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# Shakugan no Shana Volume16

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These are the novel illustrations that were included in  
volume 16

高橋弥七郎  
イラスト／いとうのいぢ

灼眼のシャナⅩⅦ

クリスマス。一人の少年が消えた。

根源たる“存在の力”を失い、いなかったことになった。ゆえに、その欠落は誰にも気付かれず、忘れ去られた。消滅してしまったモノは、二度と戻ってこなかった。

そうと知ってなお、シャナと吉田一美は、彼の生存を信じ続ける。喧騒が戻った御崎市の片隅で――。

場所は変わり、人知れず浮遊する移動城砦「星黎殿」内部。

一人の少年が空であった玉座に着いた。鎧った凱甲、靡く衣、その全てが緋色で、頭の後ろから漆黒の竜尾が伸びている。周りに控える「紅世の徒」らから「盟主」と呼ばれた少年は、一同を睥睨し、そして命を下した。

「盟主」たる少年が、御崎市で待つ彼女たちの許に戻ることは、無かった。

古の王「祭礼の蛇」を奉迎した「仮装舞踏会」は、「大命」へと静かに動き出す。





14-21

灼眼のシャナ  
XVI

高橋弥七郎

電撃文庫

Ⓜ

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社会情勢に目をやる作者

たかはし や しちろう  
高橋弥七郎

明日を目指す大阪人。豆ちしきその15一。タイトルロゴは、絵師のいとうのいぢさんやなくて、口絵1ページ目に記名のあるデザイナーの鎌部善彦さんが作成してはるんやで一。電撃文庫では『ブギーポップ』や『キノの旅』も手がけてはる偉い人なんよー。

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灼眼のシャナS

イラスト：いとうのいぢ

こんにちは、いとうです。コレを書いている今、もうすぐアニメシャナの第二期スタートです。フィレスとヨーハンのラブラブっぷりとか早く見たいです（笑）

カバー／加藤製版印刷

高橋弥七郎

イラスト／いとうのいぢ

# 灼眼のシャナⅩⅥ



悠二を慕う少女

よし だ かず み

吉田一美

「ひゃあっ!」

「二美!! 皆いなくて寂しかったよー!」

クラスメイト

お が た ま たけ

緒方真竹

「は、は、は」

クラスメイト

た な か え い た

田中栄太

バル・マスク  
[仮装舞踏会]の盟主

さいれい へび  
“祭礼の蛇”  
さか い ゆう じ  
坂井悠二

「無論だ」

「今は高きに声を求めずとも、  
貴方と語らうことができる。私は、それだけで……」

「やはり、向かわれますか？」

バル・マスク トリニティ みこ  
[仮装舞踏会] 三柱臣の「柱」『巫女』

いただき くら  
“頂の座”

ヘカテー

バル・マスク トリニティ さん ほう  
[仮装舞踏会] 三柱臣の「柱」『参謀』

ぎゃくり さいしゃ  
“逆理の裁者”

ベルペオル

てんじょう ごうか  
“天壤の劫火”アラストールのフレイムヘイズ  
えんぱつしゃくがん ろ て  
『炎髪灼眼の討ち手』

シャナ

「悠二」

「シャナ」

れいじまいご  
宝具『零時迷子』を宿すミステス

さか い ゆう じ  
坂井悠二

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灼眼のシャナ  
XVI



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## Prologue

Somewhere in the world.

The starry sky expanded upon vastness, and the base was like a pitch black crystal. The white pillars were arranged in a circle. Standing in the middle is a simple altar. The scene that displayed such an illusion-like scene is the “Seishinyou’.

In the middle of this ‘Seireiden’ base, 4 clear footsteps could be heard.

The four of them are walking in a formal posture. Walking at the rear most is the protector of the base, Fecor, and in front of him are two members of the Trinity , the ‘Arbiter of Reverse Reasoning’ Bel Peol and the ‘Master Throne’ Hecate.

Also, the leader is walking in front of them.

The 4 of them soon arrived that altar of the ‘Seishinyou’.

Fecor didn’t walk into the altar as he just remained there, kneeling on one leg as he lowered his head.

The 3 people walking with him step on the rotating white steps.

Having arrived at the center of the altar, they flew into the air like they got attracted by the stars.

2 of them remain in the air, mingling around with the stars.

Only the master, a boy, went even higher.

Dressed in armor, the soft clothing that danced in the air are all scarlet.

The pitch black eyes stare at the empty space that nobody used before.

He quickly turned around in a loud manner, and sits down on the white marble throne that belonged to him.

Showing all arrogance and still looking up at the sky, the boy gave an order.

“From now on, the ‘Seireiden’ shall head west.

The long voice overlapped with the boy and echoed throughout.

---



## Chapter 1 - I Can Only Believe

There was a city called Misaki City.

It's a city that lost lots of people.

It's not just that they died off.

But that they disappeared after being devoured.

The things that were supposed to exist in this world were devoured for their Power of Existence, the source of life, and became things that never existed in the beginning. Thus, nobody would notice that they disappeared, and they will be totally forgotten just like that.

The beings that devoured the humans were called Crimson Denizens.

They're the residents of the other world that couldn't be reached from here. They appeared here to feed on the humans for their Power of Existence, and also use this power to create all sorts of unbelievable things.

In less than a year, Misaki City got attacked many times by them.

---

In the end, the things that were supposed to exist started to disappear, and the distortion in the world continued to increase. Though the tuners managed to gradually slow down this distortion of power and eased the critical danger, the existences that were devoured and forgotten will never come back again.

Amongst them is a boy.

Right now, he's not in Misaki City.

As the ruckus of the first month gradually started to settle down on the morning of 8th January.

There's an unusual scene developing somewhere in the residential area of Misaki City West.

At a garden of a house that has the name sign 'Sakai' hanging on the door.

Swoosh!

The tree branches swayed lightly together with the light sound.

In the bone-chilling cold air, the girl in sports attire is swinging the twig in her left hand.

Alone.

Swoosh!

The girl bent low and lets out a powerful stab.

The tip of the twig stabbed through the cold air like a bullet, and for a moment, it stopped in the air. The twig then swung down near the ground, but it didn't stop as it swung one round without slowing down, and ends at the space the wielder started.

The wielder herself flipped in the air like an acrobat and kicked out with her right leg. She didn't exert additional force on the ground as she just landed on the floor silently, quickly and elegantly while bending her left knee to the maximum. Then, she stretches her knee and exerts all of the powerful force that's gathered onto the ground.

Ha!

The twig that was near the ground exerts the final strike, and sweeps through the air at several times the speed it was before.

The girl maintained her final posture, examining her movements and the killing intent in the twig.

It's unknown when the girl felt used to training alone. It's because of this feeling that she was able to control her movements and suppress everything that's revealed. Other than that, the girl didn't know what else to do.

She's facing the blank spot that was missing from her everyday life.

She continued to stand firmly on the ground to fight against that huge emptiness and the strength of that allure.

At this moment, beside the girl,

“Shana-chan, it's about time.”

The sliding door at the veranda was opened, and a gentle woman's voice was heard.

---

The girl who wasn't moving finally relaxed her tight body.

"Mn."

Answering simply, the girl called Shana took off her shoes, arranged them outside, and walked into the house

At the table in the middle of the room that's called the living room, there's a cup of hot red tea with lots of milk and sugar, and a hot towel.

"..."

Shana didn't pick it up immediately, but stared at it silently.

"Fufu, if Shana-chan's all jumpy here, the already small garden will become like a bonsai garden."

Saying this as she passed through the curtain is Sakai Chigusa.

She's a specialized housewife who's staying at home as her husband Kantaro's often overseas.

---

“There should be an even wider place. Ah, but if that happens, you don't have a reason to be here anyway. If it's just one person, I'll feel really lonely no matter how fine the morning is.”

“--...”

Shana wanted to say something, but stopped...she then said it in another meaning.



"It's not just one person."

"That's true. It'll be even more noisy once this child's born."

Of course, Chigusa interpreted it as something else altogether as she lovingly pats her tummy.

At the lump over there, a new life's being created.

Shana never asked what would be that life's name.

Shana already knew how the couple would name their children. Because of that, she couldn't ask. If that name has a 'certain word'...

Looking at the clock, Chigusa prompts the girl.

"Okay, it's the start of the new term today. Got to get ready earlier."

"Mn."

Nodding her head to hide her expression, Shana uses the towel to wipe her hands and face before gulping that red tea down in one gulp.

---

Seeing the prideful action of hers, Chigusa laughed--

“Ara ara, Shana-chan, really.”

Taking up the towel Shana put down, she gently wipes away the trace of milk on her mouth. In a series of refined actions, she spins the girl around and pushes her back.

“Okay, it's time to bath down. Warm your body properly from the outside.”

“Mn.”

Shana only showed her bitterness with this simple answer.

The two of them who are acting intimately have no blood relation.

In legal sense, they aren't mother and daughter.

And, 'right now', both of them aren't related in any sense.

These two people are rather close for some reason, like real mother and daughter.

---

This way of existence may feel unnatural, but in fact, 'it was already like that'.

A certain existence that was between these two was lost.

In the end, it ended up like this.

Chigusa didn't feel anything weird about this, but Shana felt it.

That's because Shana's not an ordinary person from this world.

She's one of the supernatural existences called Flame Hazes who're here to maintain the balance in the world and kill of any 'Crimson Denizen's that were ravaging the world. Her title's called the 'Enpatsu Shakugan no Uchite', and her alias in this city's life is Hirai Yukari. Right now, she's temporarily staying in a room of a certain high class apartment.

Chigusa didn't know about the former two, and only about the latter two.

Shana didn't intend to tell her the truth as well.

---

That's because the thing that's lost between them was Chigusa's son.

More accurately, it's not her own son, but the remains of her son who was attacked by the 'Crimson Lord' in this city. He was supposed to be a substitute that was supposed to disappear quickly.

The girl who was supposed to be just a supernatural person following through her duty was given a unique name by that substitute existence, 'Shana'. They went through lots of battles and days together...and on a certain day, he suddenly vanished.

The moment she recovered, all traces of that substitute disappeared from her.

That happened on the silent night, 24th December, Christmas Eve.

"..."

Shana walked from the living room to the corridor. As a habit these two weeks, she looked up the stairs in front of her. At the top of the stairs, there's a room she ran to many times and entered from the parapet outside.

---

Right now, there's no one there.

Seeing the mark of the nodachi that stabbed through the door the first time they met, she was lost for several seconds. She tried to look for a reason as to why he disappeared, or even a trace of his remaining existence—it's like she was looking for that substitute himself.

But there was nothing there, nothing at all.

Ever since then, she never went back into the room, nor did she have a reason to go back in. Even when the friends of that substitute came to visit, she was just here to lead them, not willing to go in. She did not want to enter that place.

“Shana.”

The voice came from the black Obsidian treasure tool that's hanging in front of the chest—the 'Cocytus'. The Crimson Lord Alastor, the 'Flame of Heavens', prompted her. Recently, this became common.

“Un.”

Shana replied simply in a similar manner.

---

When did he started to call her this?

Shana opened the door of the changing room as she asked this.

Before they came to the city, he didn't need to say anything like that to get the Flame Haze 'Enpatsu Shakugan no Uchite's attention, because there's no need to differentiate with others or use the chance to talk to others. It's because of this that both of them always felt that it was useless, and irritating too.

But unknowingly, both of them started to get used to calling each other like that, and even felt that 'the girl who exists here' is here.

Most likely, it's because the calling of their names would bring a change in ideas...Shana felt that this was weird and takes off the 'Cocytus' Alastor used to express his will. She puts it under the towel that's beside the bath , and quickly takes off her clothes before putting it into the basket beside her. She completed this series of movements smoothly and unknowingly.

She pondered for a while. What she felt was—

---

There's no need to be alert about him entering the bathroom because something sudden happened.

There's no need to waste time lecturing him about his rude behavior whenever he went to the basin to wash his face while she was showering.

There's no need to work together with Chigusa to blame and punish him.

Having realized so many things, she felt a chilling yet relaxing feeling.

Shana hurriedly walked into the bathroom, seemingly trying to shake these feelings off.

She immediately turns the shower tap on, and the water drenched her head before it even became hot. The chill that landed on her washed everything away, and the warmth that happened afterwards felt vague.

In the fluid that flowed past her face, there's nothing else in it other than water.

As it was the first day of the third term, in the Misaki Municipal High School, a buzz louder than normal could be heard.

“Yo!” “Good morning!” “Happy New Year!” “Oh, happy new year.” “Good morning~!” “Oh.” “Long time no see!” “It’s only been 4 days, why are you saying that anyway?”

Amidst the buzz, there were greetings between people when they met, and also—

“Hey hey, where did you go play?” “My family’s so stingy...we only went to the Misaki Shrine.” “Fufu, I went to Hawaii, Ha, wai, i.” “Fine fine, you said that for the third time today already.” “As for me, I was sleeping during these few days” “me too~” and all sorts of topics related to January and the winter break.

Amongst them, there was one especially energetic voice,

“JYAAANNN!!!! HOW’S THIS!?”

Ogata Matake happily passed the bento box over.

---

Lined up in the box were extremely ordinary mantous<sup>1</sup>, over twenty of them wrapped in thin paper. The whiff of chocolate came over, and the mantous could be described as rare.

“Well, erm...isn’t it too early to take the mantous out now?”

“What? I even wanted to use this as a greeting gift.”

Facing Tanaka’s nonchalant response, Ogata answered back as she puffed her cheeks.

Tanaka hurriedly apologized.

“Sorry, sorry. Well, you did go back to the countryside?”

“That’s mother’s hometown. It’s not really right to say that I went back.”

She herself was born and grew up in Misaki City.

“I had to accompany my relatives and ended up being dragged around to attend all sorts of activities and places to greet people. It was tiring. That’s how it’s like in the

---

countryside. I didn't even have the time to call until when I came back two days ago."

Tanaka again turned to look at the dessert in the box.

"So was that the 'surprise' you mentioned? It looks good, but that isn't something you would give others early in the morning, right?"

"It's just the opening ceremony today, so we'll be dismissed after that, right? I intended to bring this over first...are?"

While saying halfway through, Ogata looked around the classroom.

Tanaka watched her do this,

"!"

And had a certain expectation.

However,

"Ike-kun, he doesn't look like he's here."

Ogata said the name of the 'other person'--the hero of the class, the 'megane weirdo', the name, Ike Hayato.

“Normally, he would help pass this around to everyone.”

“Ike should be in the student council office, right? It's the third semester now, so the duties of the student council would be passed on to the first and second years. That guy's going to be busier from now on.”

Tanaka tried his best not to show his dismay as he explained. Luckily, Ogata was looking at somewhere else—a girl who seemed like she just came back from the staff room with some printed stuff.

“Ah, Kazumi-chan! There's mantous to eat~!”

Seeing her good friend nod her head, Ogata put down the bento box, put her hand on her cheek, and sighed, “Fuu...”

“Shana...her bag's not here. She's most likely not here yet. Satou pushed back his transfer request back, yet he

said that he wanted to take leave. The new term just started, yet everyone didn't look like they had any drive.  
”

“Yeah...that's right.”

As the good friend of Tanaka and Ogata during Middle School—the frivolous bishounen (he could be called that) Satou Keisaku planned to transfer to a famous high school far away at the start of the 3rd semester, but according to him, he had to push back the transfer till the new school year because of 'problems with the administrative processes'.

The plan to gather everyone the day before and give Satou a farewell party as they celebrate the new year, but it was halted in the end—and because Ike and Tanaka had things they had to attend to—Ogata went back with her parents to the countryside earlier.

That was why she excitedly brought mantous for everyone to eat when everyone were reunited two weeks later, but it ended up like to. To her, this really dampened her enthusiasm, and it couldn't be helped that it dampened her enthusiasm.

---

At this moment, Tanake suddenly felt an urge to confirm something with her.

“--”

But on looking at the atmosphere in the classroom, he knew that it would be a waste of breath. Right now, the 'everyone' she mentioned just referred to 'those few'. Even so, Tanaka still harbored some hope as he wanted to ask her to understand.

“--Oga...”

Before he could say 'Oga-chan'--

“Good morning, Ogata-chan, Tanaka-kun.”

Having put the printed materials on the teacher's desk, Yoshida Kazumi walked over--

“KAZUMMMIII CHHHAAANNN~!!”

“KYAAAH!!”

Shouting out in reflex, Yoshida—

---

“I was really bored when 'everyone' wasn't around~!”

“!?”

Was shocked by the words she heard next, and turned to look at Tanaka.

However, Tanaka just shook his head slightly, denying the one trace of hope he should have left.

Of course, Ogata didn't notice their actions nor the meanings behind them.

“Shana's not here yet, Satou's absent, Ike-kun still had to do student council stuff. If Kazumi-chan wasn't here yet—”

“You can be alone with Tanaka!”

Sitting beside her, Nakamura Kimiko spoke up before Ogata could.

“WA, WHA, WHAT ARE YOU...!”

Nakamura Kimiko closed in on Ogata, whose face was blushing really awkwardly, and said in a fawning tone as if she became a completely different person,

---

"I say, just gimme a mautou, okay~ I haven't eaten anything this morning~"

"Ah? You want to eat now?"

Sitting in front of her seat was Fujita Harumi, who turned her back backwards and let out a reluctant tone. She even displayed a show of a vice class representative's nature as she said to Ogata,

"Really, Oga-chan, aren't you scared of being scolded after showing such things?"

"Ahem, that's no problems."

After clearing her throat, Ogata recovered from her panic and proudly straightened her chest.

"After morning training at our class activity, I brought some of it to the teachers in the staff room. The teachers all ate them, so even if we were found out, they can't possibly scold us."

"Fufu, as expected of you."

Fujita smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

---

On the other hand, Nakamura reached her arm over.

“I'll help myself then.”

“Just one though.”

“I know that.”

“I want one too~”

Facing the girls' chirpy conversation, Tanaka felt that he was witnessing a painting of a scenery from afar. His eyes met Yoshide, who harbored the same feelings, and they naturally turned to look at the center of the classroom.

That place lacked a certain existence.

And then, Ogata said,

“Ah, Ike-kun!”

Both of them turned to look. The door was opened, and a boy walked in. He's the class representative of class 1-2, and also the hero who would help others, the 'megane weirdo' who's gradually expanding his services out of the classroom—Ike Hayato.

---

Yoshida and him naturally looked at each other in the eyes--

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

And yet looked away unnaturally.

Not knowing anything at all, Ogata said in a cheery voice,

“Ike-kun, hurry over here!”

Ike looked shaky for a while, but managed to quickly recover. He calmly said the customary new year greetings to everyone who he hadn't met for a long time,

“Happy new year. Ah, those native products were the same as the ones in the staff room.”

“Eh, you ate them?”

The attitude he showed to the shocked Ogata was no different from that calm and kind demeanour he normally showed.

---

“Un. I went there to prepare for the opening ceremony , so I had on. The chocolate taste on the surface really made it an interesting combination. Was that a famous product?”

“Sort of. I chose it because the tanuki design on the box packaging was really cute though.”

“A cute tanuki...is it...?”

He remembered vaguely that the thing he saw in the staff room was just a rough modification of some kanji, but it was unnecessary to mention more. Either way, he didn't understand the feelings of the girls, so he just answered without being too much of a hassle,

“Un, that was really an unique picture.”

After saying that, Ike again said to Yoshida,

“Happy new year to you, Yoshida-san.”

“Happy new year to you, Ike-kun.”

It was a normal greeting between close friends.

But this greeting became so empty at this moment. Both of them inadvertently felt pain, and they couldn't even force a smile. They could only show ambiguous attitudes and expressions as if they were mirrors facing each other.

This probably could be expected.

Last year, on December 24th, Ike confessed his own feelings to Yoshida.

Yoshida accepted Ike's feelings, but was unable to repay him back.

As the party last night didn't happen, both of them felt awkward and fearful, and thus, never had the chance to interact with each other. They really wished for some ease and recovery in their relationship during these two weeks of emptiness, but it was the same as when they left each other... it was a block of ice that didn't divulge any feelings inside, one that could only melt through meeting each other.

Of course, both of them won't reveal this to anyone else.

---

But the girls over here are girls, and because they are girls, they were extremely sensitive to that 'atmosphere'. Even so, the three of them all responded in different ways, which were—

“I say, huh!?”

Nakamura Kimiko, who was curious and decided to ask without thinking of the consequences—

“Ah, it's about time to start class.”

Fujita clapped her hand over Nakamura's mouth.

“...”

Ogata wordlessly looked at them in a concerned manner.

Tanaka was the only one who didn't understand the reason behind their reactions as he showed a surprised expression.

“?”

“That's right. We should return to our seats too.”

---

Ike was grateful for Fujita's kind intentions, and barely managed to hide this through.

And Yoshida herself was grateful to be saved—

“Un. Ogata-chan, we'll talk about the native products next—”

Saying till here, the door creaked open.

The pressure they would feel before they even looked over filled the entire classroom.

That was a tremor the students of class 1-2 felt before, one that they hadn't experienced for a long time, and one that's accompanied with stiffness and fear. Everyone remained stiff, and the buzzing that came from the other classrooms like before this classroom was opened emphasize this shockingly abnormal scene further.

There was no need to explain who created such an atmosphere, as the petite girl just stood at the door silently, not entering the classroom for some reason.

“ ... ”

The girl looked like she was either angry or sad, and it was the first time the other classmates saw her like that. She just stood there blankly like there was an invisible castle wall in front of her. She either looked like a strong person who endured the pain, and like a kid who just pouted and sat on the floor.

This silence that nobody could break—

“Shana.”

Was barely broken by the only exception—Yoshida Kazumi.

Shana still remained motionless as she gave a yearning look at the friend who called her, the love rival who, like her, had secret and thoughts on her own.

But Yoshida was unable to do anything for her.

Right now, what she could do was to carry the yearning look on her friend with her own face, and showed the fact that was painful to accept, both for herself, and for her love rival as she looked at the seat in the middle of the classroom.

Shana endured her pain too and followed her look.

“...”

The expected reality—the fact that crushed her hope mercilessly was shown in front of her.

It's unknown when she started to get used to it, 'that place' that became a part of her daily life, the obvious discord in her memory, and the difference from her real memory. If there was a need to say it in an objective way, it's 'empty'.

There was one less seat in the classroom.

In the eastern district of Misaki City, the Satou residence looked extremely large in the sea of mansions in the old residential areas.

Staying inside the indoor bar inside it, the Flame Haze 'Choshi no Yomite' Margery Daw remained like she was normally—drunk and lying on the sofa—as she watched the boy Satou, the owner of the house, leave through the back door.

The huge and thick book that's put beside her like a stack of canvas, the treasure tool 'Grimoire' cackled away in laughing as it moved about.

"Sheesheeshee, I don't know whether it's perfect timing or not. Recently, I've been starting to wondering if there's any meaning behind them even if it were just a simple coincidence."

On hearing the voice of 'Fangs of Devastation' Marchosias, the Crimson Lord who made a contract with her and gave her supernatural power, Margery sighed deeply and answered,

"That's true. Since it's so troubling, there would definitely be ill intent behind it."

She looked like she wanted to hide her expression as she glanced at the table beside her from behind her arm that's sticking to her face.

Placed on that thick glass table was an empty envelop that was opened.

It was the remain of the document that was sent over this morning.

---

The sender was a name a travel-loving person would definitely have heard of, a mini transport company in Europe. However, that was a disguise meant to fool the world. In fact, it was a support place that acts as an information and transport relay network for Flame Haze all over the world—an 'Outlaw' branch'.

The data was the result of a discussion between Keisaku, who was traumatised by the loss of a boy, and Margery—although it was more like begging. Or rather, it was the reason why his plans to enroll in a famous school outside the state from the 3rd semester on were put on hold.

At first, the real reason for transferring wasn't to go back to live with his parents who he had a bad relationship with, but to provide assistance to Margery by studying and improving human relations—that was the final solution he came up with after a long consideration.

However, this plan was wrecked after his friend's disappearance (he didn't think that the boy perished, or rather, it was brought forward. As an immature boy, he couldn't wait to grow slowly, and it wasn't because people were looking forward to his fighting and assisting

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abilities, but because of danger, anxiety and friendship. He couldn't endure having to remain on the sidelines.

Of course, Margery knew that the situation was such that they couldn't waste their time anymore.

Not only that, she realized the seriousness of this matter more than the other two Flame Hazes in the city.

Because she assess of the loss of that 'Mystes' boy ( using her own knowledge of this fact) using the three factors, functionality, competency and unique attribute.

The functionality here would be the ability to recover the 'Power of Existence' at midnight completely, and the sharp senses and insight with regards to the presence and power that far exceeded the Flame Hazes—that's the ability of the host of the 'Reiji Maigo'.

And the competency would mean keeping abnormally cool even in the face of danger, seeing through the enemy's plots and hidden intentions and counterattacking perfectly—a human quality.

Having fought on the same front line in this city, they managed to win against 'Denizens' and 'Crimson Lords' that many were unable to take down in a frontal

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assault—or rather, defend until the end, and a large part of that would undoubtedly be because of him. Margery had to admit to this point.

It's because of this that his loss from the battlefield will be too serious. And since it may be a part of the ploy by that 'Crimson Lord' of 'Bal Masque', the invisible loss on the Flame Hazes' side would feel greater.

(In the worst case scenario, this Misaki City would become a modern 'Maelstrom of War', or it may have reached that level already...that's really irritating.)

Margery exhaled a breath full of alcohol, and there was a tinge of flaming anger in this action.

(And this definitely had to do with 'that guy'.)

The last thing she considered was--

The unique attribute, the mysterious jizaishiki that was said to have been forced into the inside of the 'Reiji Maigo', causing it to change, the one link to her sworn enemy—and the significance of this thing that's related to 'Silver'.

If not for that, she wouldn't have considered everything to such an extent with that frivolous attitude of hers.

(In this situation, I can't move about without an aim...I have to let go of the tail I caught. I need to take action after considering all the conditions.)

The reason why she was able to get a position that suited Satou Keisaku was because the other two Flame Hazes suggested that 'we needed to invigilate Misaki City first'. It was a suggestion they picked up on. To Satou, and even to Margery and the rest, this decision had a significance of 'setting up the foundations to expand their movements'.

And thus, at the end of last year, she sent a few letters to Outlaw, including a few private letters, and waited for two weeks.

On the day before the third semester started, the day before, a letter was sent back.

It was news that Satou was really happy about.

Marchosias muttered in a rare low voice,

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“Is 'this' really alright...”

Unlike the normally frivolous attitude he would normally give others, he had a strict view about the mission, and wasn't really willing to get Satou involved.

And Margery herself used her arm to block the expression that wasn't really clear in the first place as she answer,

“This can be called a test. In other words, a test if 'he would really follow my orders'.”

“I can't really tell which side I should be more expectant on.”

Facing Marchosias' puzzled doubt, Margery answered with a clear voice,

“The side that survives, of course.”

Tanaka Eita dragged his heavy footsteps and went back home alone.

He gave Ogata the task of delivering the native products to Satou, who took leave, and Margery, who's

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residing in his house, and escaped alone. He just told Ogata that he had something urgent to do, and didn't know if Ogata believed him or not.

(Oga-chan must be starting to realize...that I've been avoiding nee-chan...)

Like Satou and Ogata, his house was located in the old residential estate in Misaki City East. Because of that, they attended the same middle school together, and most notably, he had a lot of hijinks with Satou. Though they washed their hands clean of those acts when they entered high school, the fact that they were good friends still didn't change.

Even when the outstanding woman he admired, the 'Choshi no Yomite' Margery Daw appeared in their lives, and even after getting involved in the war against the 'Crimson Denizens', this abnormal situation was the same as ever.

(I can't continue to run away...I knew that already.)

It was three months ago that this relationship had a delicate change in it.

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In a certain battle, he witnessed Ogata crushed into pieces. This tragedy occurred in the independent space ‘Fuzetsu’, so it was settled once she ‘recovered’, but that terrifying image that was etched into his mind broke a mental pillar of support in him. Whenever they were about to face a battle, he would be reminded of ‘that image’, and his body and soul would break down in fear. That was a deep emotional scar that he didn’t know how to deal with, and he didn’t know when it would recover.

He felt really disappointed and angry at being so useless, so much that he refused to face Margery. He barely managed to summon his courage to give her an emergency report last year in an incident that happened at the end of last year, but only because the critical situation involved ‘a friend of him’ getting involved in danger. However, the basic problem wasn’t settled.

(I know what to do too...but, I—)

The overly righteous boy would not compromise even when troubled, and he continued to sink without asking others for help. He thought that he should bear this problem because it was his own problem.

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After questioning and answering himself for a few months, he hid his problem vaguely under his skin. He walked into the alley that led to his house, and at that moment—

“Yo.”

“Satou!?”

He met his good friend, leaning on the wall around the corner.



It seemed that Satou was waiting here until he returned back from school. From his plainclothes, it seemed that he didn't decide to skip school on the way to school, but that he never intended to go there in the first place. He looked cheery and yet somewhat lonely.

Feeling anxious by that attitude of his attitude, Tanaka couldn't help but ask in a stern tone,

"Didn't you take leave today because you got something on?"

"Ahh, I've finished all the preparations already. Just want to say hello to you first."

"Preparations?"

On seeing Satou answer without remorse, Tanaka felt even anxious. It was a disgusting feeling...normally, he would feel extremely irritated, but now, he didn't know why he wanted to release this unique anxiety.

Tanaka didn't know how much he read into Satou, and Satou willingly told him the path he would take the next day.

“I’m going to the Outlaw Branch in Tokyo tomorrow.”

“!!”

Feeling shocked, Tanaka finally understood the reason behind his anxiety. He wasn’t worried about his good friend going on the trip, but remorseful and envious that his friend left him behind while he was still unwilling to move forward, and took the decisive first step.

Satou moved his body away from the wall and stood in front of his good friend.

“You should know the reason why I’m doing this even if I don’t tell you.”

“Eh?”

Tanaka answered with a heavy tone.

At the end of last year, both of them met something they couldn’t forget about.

Their friend suddenly disappeared.

Also, it wasn’t an ordinary disappearance. Like the other Torches, he disappeared from other people’s

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memories, and even the remains were wiped off cleanly. It was a disappearance of existence.

Luckily, that friend was a 'Mystes' who had the treasure tool 'Reiji Maigo' residing in him, so they didn't need to worry that he would disappear. He was a youth who was just like an ordinary person, so until now and from then on, they could view him as per normal and assist each other in battle...but on the day after the battle ended, they painfully realized their folly, and realized that this was all their imagination.

Shana—the Flame Haze girl who was closest to him.

With her leading the charge, they stealthy looked in through the Sakai residence's balcony, and were completely shocked. They then hurriedly returned home to flip and rummage through their cupboards to look for their photos, only to be completely horrified once they realized that he was completely gone.

It was because they often interacted with Flame Hazes in their everyday life that they understood 'the truth about this world', and remembered all about him. On the flip side, that good friend's existence only remained in their memories.

However, while they were completely shaken, Shana passed 'something' to them to see.

They didn't see what was inside, but she said that it was proof that he was alright.

She even said that this wouldn't be sent back if he disappeared.

She said that as a friend.

Satou responded to her feelings and chose the path he wanted to take.

But yet Tanaka himself could only remain here powerlessly.

It's because he understood all of that that Tanaka felt so jealous.

"At this time, I can't just run away from this city alone casually, but even so, it's pointless to stay here...look."

"...?"

He took out some pieces of paper from his pocket.

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The pieces of detailed information was written in Japanese, and it was a report about Satou Keisaku. It didn't just involve him, as the report included his relatives, friends, neighbors and even the shop attendants in the convenience stores he liked to go to.

He pointed out the line with his finger and showed it to Tanaka.

It was written,

“Satou Keisaku-shi had no detrimental or dangerous existence beside him, and thus, the primary contact and the scout that made the special report on him have given their approval.”

In other words, he was recognized and allowed to be Margery's representative in Outlaw.

“I heard that the detailed report was made by Carmel-san...but Margery-san said that I should check that place out and see what I should aim for.”

“Is, is that so?”

Tanaka started to feel that he was being swallowed by the shadows of envy, but he still couldn't hold back his feelings as he showed them through his voice.

Having been Tanaka's friend for so many years, Satou definitely knew what his friend was thinking, but he still continued,

"In fact, I think I should be going to an Outlaw branch ...or something like that. But I heard that the Tokyo base was a secret to a small fry like me. It'll be great if I could see a Flame Haze."

"If that's the case..."

"I heard that it was a place ran by someone Margery-san's very familiar with. Forget about the investigation report, I guess the reason why I was chosen so quickly was because of that."

"If that's the case, what do you..."

Knowing that his good friend wanted to continue on with those cruel words, Tanaka finally couldn't take it anymore.

“What, what do you want me to do?”

“...”

Satou answered with a taunting voice and attitude, and placed his forehead in the middle of Tanaka’s eyebrows,

“...What do I want you to do, you say?”

Facing the tall and large Tanaka, that posture that looked like he wanted to tread forward and grab him on the collar. It certainly didn’t look natural at all.

“I’m not inviting you to ‘come along with me’, and not going about playing gathering.”

After saying that, he mocked his own uselessness.

“I just came to tell you that I wanted to do this.”

It sounded carefree and yet lonely at the same time.

Tanaka’s face showed the most obvious expression,

“Are you envious?”

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“!!”

Satou pointed that out correctly, and Tanaka inadvertently lost his voice.

“It’s great that you could feel that way.”

“Eh?”

This time, the smile had peace and delight written all over it.

“Because if you didn’t react in this case, we really need to go on our separate ways now.”

“Satou.”

Satou didn’t let his good friend continue as he just pats his good friend’s shoulder and walks over from beside him.

“Goodbye. I’ll be back soon, so I’ll leave Margery-san to you during this time. The grannies just need to worry about clearing the bar, and that would be the bare minimum.”

“SATOU!”

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Seeing his good friend wave his hand as he left, Tanaka could only call his name out. At the same time, he felt extremely angry and disappointed that he couldn't say anything else nor catch up to him.

The third Flame Haze in this city, the 'Manipulator of Objects' Wilhelmina Carmel was staying in a high class apartment that she shared with Shana through the false identity of Hirai Yukari.

Whenever combustible waste came, she would bring a large bag of shredded paper out, and would even get baffled looks from the neighbors. Anyone can imagine how much information was sent to her from Outlaw.

Right now, she's dressed in a maid outfit and sitting in front of the steel desk, sorting out the piles of documents and arranging them. She glanced at a report, and showed the slightly frowning eyebrows.

"It seems that they sent back replies to this made report from everywhere de arimasu."

"Recognition of danger."

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A voice came from the headdress treasure tool 'Persona', and it belonged to the 'Crimson Lord' that granted her supernatural power—'Illusionist Crown' Tiamat, who summarized the situation succinctly.

The central organization of Outlaw seemed to finally realize the importance of the report she sent over, and the dangers it presented to the world. They were minor, but right now, there were all sorts of relevant information being sent in from all over the world.

During these past few months, the Outlaw branches all over the world were reeling from the loss of the 'Kubelik's Orchestra', which specialized in spreading and controlling the information, and 'Monteverdi Choir', which was in charge of transport control, arrangement and shipping. There was a meaningless frenzy rush over the leadership of the organization, from the Flame Haze in charge of the sub-branches to the humans in charge of the groups. Recently, it seemed like there was going to be a peaceful resolution.

Amongst them, the biggest reason was that the loss of the important strategic points that were so serious they wouldn't allow for any internal fighting. Many famed

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Flame Hazes were being eliminated, from a few to tens of them, and it felt like a forced twist of the neck on the neck as the organization were forced to turn from inside to outside.

During the same period, Shana, Wilhelmina and Margery sent out a bombshell-like report together to the temporary leader of Outlaw, the Flame Haze 'Braider of Trembling Might' Sophie Sawallisch.

There were two points,

First, the 'Mystes' with the mysterious treasure tool 'Reiji Maigo' disappeared.

Second, the organization that was undoubtedly involved in this was the largest 'Denizen' organization in the world, 'Bal Masque'.

With this report, Outlaw finally had a n idea on who were the ones who attacked the important bases. It was somewhat biased to go about complaining 'it's too late' or something. As the only large organization in the world amongst all the small organizations, there was a real reason why it didn't get 'somewhat suspicious' (even after receiving Wilhelmina's report).

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‘Bal Masque’ role was like how Outlaw was to Flame Haze. It did information exchange and assistance to protect the Denizens, from the ones not involved in any organizations, to merging with other organizations and assembling them, securing the secret transportation routes not occupied by Flame Hazes and even training newcomers so that they could survive. Thus, that organization didn’t have a motive to launch a great war.

Also, the one leading the organization, one of the Trinity, ‘Arbiter of Reverse Reasoning’ Bel Peol was said to be someone with lots of plots to achieve her goals, but like the impression she gives, she lived in the ‘darkness’. Right now, the global scale events of a full frontal assault shouldn’t be like what they do.

In fact, this organization never had the ability to launch what could be called a war for a long time. Ever since they lost their leader in that brutal war, the chances of them launching a grand scale war would be a definite ‘zero’. This would be the biggest reason why Outlaw omitted them from the suspects.

Also, since they lost their leader, there was no need to launch another grand scale war. Even if it’s to wear down the enemy’s numbers, it couldn’t possibly change

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the world on a global scale. It would be a temporary victory for them in losses of numbers, but to the organizations relying on them, it would have a detrimental effect.

However,

The emergency report Shana and the rest sent over completely changed their viewpoint.

It wouldn't be too if the General 'Thousand Changes' Sydonay of the Trinity, who kept roaming around the world, appeared. However, since the 'Master Throne' Hecate and 'Tempest Hoof' Fecor, the guardian of the fortress Seireiden appeared at the same place, it couldn't be just a coincidence.

Her aim was definitely to use the 'Reiji Maigo', this high-capability yet ignored treasure tool. If they considered that, their appearance would have some explosive meaning to it.

Also, the 'Bal Masque's scout, hunter and mercenary 'Destructive Blade' Sabrac launched a large scale attack right before the 'Reiji Maigo' disappeared.

It became an undeniable fact that these events had a huge relation to this.

Also, the important bases were attacked too.

There was no need to look for Bel Peol's whereabouts. The Outlaw organization have recognized this series of mysterious events, and finally linked them to 'Bel Peol' in their discussions.

Of course, to Shana and the rest, ever since Hecate attacked them, they were ringing bells for the past few months, so they would only feel angry, not grateful that they would understand this now.

The organization that was regrouped by Sophie finally had a lead, and with Sophie's command, they sent all sorts of countermeasure information against 'Bal Masque'. To the Flame Hazes here, they felt that they merely achieved these two little victories.

"Even so, there's low accuracy of the reports and the excessive problems. Looks like I have to sort them out later de arimasu."

"Gradual and progressive."

---

Hearing her partner say this with the hidden meaning 'do it slowly and seriously', Wilhelmina nodded her head and looked at another outstanding case file.

"Also, there's this. There's a detailed report of a little scuffle in inner China...during the time when Europe was in turmoil, there was some relaxation in the control everywhere, some places became suspicious and weren't willing to provide assistance, and the erratic standards have gotten so serious de arimasu."

"Situation is critical."

"Mu, in this case, I don't know if we can handle it if the 'Arbiter of Reverse Reasoning' decide to take action seriously—"

She said that as she opened a new envelope. At this moment—

"I'm back."

The coming home greeting that became somewhat familiar during these past few months entered her ears.

It was a voice, one with a forced calm yet lacking the inner support, an empty voice.

Even though she could feel the pain in the voice, Wilhelmina continued to keep that iron face on her. As the guardian, she was clear that pitying and consoling her would be ridiculing her, and because of that,

“You came back.”

She answered with a casual attitude.

Shana removed her shoes and changed into her slippers in a mechanical manner, and then walked down the corridor to that little dining table.

Wilhelmina pushed the fusuma aside and followed behind her. Shana would report all that she knew of today during school at the dinner table, and this was something they already decided on.

Both of them face each other as they sit on the chairs. Shana didn't make any introduction as she went straight to the report.

“The seat disappeared just like a normal Torch.”

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On hearing that tranquil tone of hers, Wilhelmina felt really bad. But even so, they couldn't give up on their mission. She hid her complicated feelings and asked simply,

“Did the letter change?”

“—no.”

Shana paused for a while before making the answer. Her hand's placed on her school bag.

What was placed inside was a light pink envelope with a patterned seal.

The seal was opened, showing that the contents of this letter was removed before.

It happened on December 24th, during Christmas Eve, and it was a duel between Shana and Yoshida Kazumi—they would wait at their designated places for the boy—it was the love letter the boy sent back.

In the end, the boy disappeared, but the letter that had the boy's name on it was returned.

Most likely, this was an inexplicable thing.

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Like what Shana said, as a Torch with a treasure tool, a 'Mystes', he disappeared from the memories of his mother and everyone around him, and there wasn't any trace left.

The ones who remembered him were the Flame Hazes, including Shana, and the few good friends who got involved with them and knew the 'truth to this world'. This was a common phenomenon that occurred to Torches—the substitutes and remains of humans who were devoured—a normal phenomenon.

However, only the name of the recipient of this letter was still left.

And it was returned to the girl.

If 'Bal Masque' got the 'Reiji Maigo', they definitely wouldn't care about the personal relationship of the 'Mysters', who's just a vessel. Who, of all people, would choose this letter and send it back? Or was there a hidden sinister plot in this.

The more they continued to think, the more suspicious they got, and the empty feeling of the mystery continued to expand.

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But Shana accepted this mystery as an answer.

This letter was hope to her.

It's because the impact she felt that time was so big that she believed in this even more.

On Christmas Eve night, she got struck by the chilling fear of a memory loss, carried Yoshida Kazumi up the snowy sky, and landed on the Sakai's residence balcony, and looked into his room—only to find the room empty. At that time, she felt a huge shock.

The letter was sent over on the next day.

If this was a letter that was aimed to misdirect her by making her think that he would be alive, they wouldn't just leave a trail behind like that. They would just leave all the traces or bring his letters over.

Thus, she believed.

That this letter was hope,

That he didn't disappear.

(--“But, this, wha...what's going on?”)

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Shana said the same thing to Yoshida Kazumi, who read the returned letter and was all confused.

She said that the boy's disappearance was because the enemy found that he had some value. He was just taken away.

(--"But, but, Shana-chan."--)

She said that he wasn't a boy who would just watch and disappear like that, and they knew that better than anyone else.

If it was one person, the calm in her mind will forcefully deny this overly low possibility.

(--"This letter...is the proof...?--)

But if it were both of them, who had the same feelings as love rivals, it would be believable.

On hearing her say that, Yoshida Kazumi finally shook off her bewilderment and doubt as she cried.

(--"Un...I, I believe too...Shana-chan."--)

Shana didn't cry. She decided that she would only cry when she reunite with that boy.

Right now, her strong will was as hard as a dam, holding back all the emotions and preventing them from rushing out from her heart.

Wilhelmina seemed to recognize this strong will in the girl she liked. However, she continued to maintain a calm tone and reaffirmed the truth.

"In other words, it seems that the unnatural phenomenon was only limited to that letter de arimasu."

"Yes."

Shana nodded her head at Tiamat. Alastor asked from her chest,

"Was there any new information about 'Bal Masque' in today's mail?"

"...Unfortunately, the reports that were sent in today were mostly about the remnants of the Outlaw branches that were attacked, and there wasn't too many reports about the 'Reiji Maigo'."

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“Is that so.”

After saying that, Shana stood up.

What happened next had become routine.

After changing her clothes and taking a bath, she would sort the information with Wilhelmina until midnight. At midnight, she would go over to Margery and train there without affecting her strength. Then, she would patrol around Misaki City for any paranormal events, and head back to the Sakai residence at dawn to train.

Flame Hazes don't need to sleep.

Thus, this could be done in a physical standpoint.

But this non-stop lifestyle would be affected by the memories and habits when she was human, and would have the danger of breaking down mentally. Even superheroes need to rest.

But even after knowing this, Shana continued to work without hesitation.

And Alastor, Wilhelmina and Tiamat didn't stop her.

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That's because the three of them felt something dangerous from the girl, and they feared that she would break down if they didn't let her do something. Thus, this lifestyle continued through January.

Wilhelmina looked at the back of the girl, and felt very conflicted.

(should I tell her that information?\_

In fact, she had a report that could stop the girl, or rather, it was information that could be considered a breakthrough. However, that was merely a possibility, and if they embarked on it, it would be meaningless work. Even if they really did that, they would fight a battle they would not win—it was that kind of information.

This information originated several hundred years ago—the words of the 'Soaring Tower of Quintessence' Gaida.

(--"You can't bring my 'Tendoukyuu' together with that 'Seireiden'--)

This ‘Crimson Lord’ that was interested in the arts created the two greatest treasure tools with many humans. It was the moving fortress ‘Tendoukyuu’ and the moving base ‘Seireiden’.

Having gotten sick of devouring humans, he broke his relation with ‘Bal Masque’, and as a price, he gave Bel Peol Seireiden, and used the ‘Tendoukyuu’ as his resting spot.

Because of that, ‘Seireiden’ became ‘Bal Masque’s base, and the ‘Tendoukyuu’ later became the huge cradle for Wilhelmina, Alastor, and the new ‘Flame-Haired Burning-Eyed Hunter’ that was trained by another Crimson Lord (and it was sunk in the sea).

Those words were what Wilhelmina and her fellow comrades heard from Gavidia when they borrowed that moving fortress. In fact, after borrowing Tendoukyuu successfully, they abided by those words and skipped through the path of the ‘Seireiden’ before heading to their destination.

And now,

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That sentence appeared in her mind with a completely different meaning.

(But she would lose control if I tell her.)

Wilhelmina admitted deep inside her heart and the girl and the boy have developed their relationship to such an extent, even though she didn't want to admit it. Alastor said those words, but didn't tell her. He undoubtedly felt the same way.

(How should I explain this to her?)

At that time, there had to be another compromise, she thought.

Anyway, right now, she could only look at the door fusuma that was slowly closing.

Shana walked into the room.

“!”

She found a package on her table, and felt excited and anxious at the same time. She tried her best not to show

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these emotions in her voice as she asked the thing on her chest for permission,

“Alastor.”

“Um.”

After getting this simple answer, she put the ‘Cocytus’ that’s hanging on her under the pillow of the futon that was neatly arranged. That was something Wilhelmina taught her when they lived together again, something they agreed on when she got her own mail and package back.

“It’s from Sophie...”

Except for a few exceptions, any packages that were specially noted for her would definitely be from Sophie Sawallisch. Most of the time, that would be the reply she would send back to Shana.

To Shana, this warrior that had been through many battles was known as ‘Bold Mother’ (Mother Clergy) was one of her teachers as well. After leaving her hometown, the moving fortress Tendoukyuu, she once followed her on a journey and learnt the basic social skills.

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It was for a short time, but to the 'Flame-Haired Burning-Eyed Hunter' who only got stronger as a warrior and was completely pure and defenseless as a girl, Sophie guided her a lot in her transformation into a human.

Even after several years of separation, Shana still liked this nun who had a powerful presence, yet had a gentle and fiery personality, and who would even show some elegance. Thus, while living in Misaki City with Wilhelmina, when they started contacting Outlaw, Shana would occasionally send her simple phone-like messages.

This form of communication got even busier when Sophie started staying at a certain place...when she was invited to quell the chaos in Outlaw. The messages up till now were the same, Shana would send a clear and simple answer, and Sophie would send a delicate answer back.

However, it was different this time.

At least on Shana's side.

"..."

Sitting on the chair, Shana pulled the scissors out from her drawer and opened the package.

After removing the wrapping of the package, she found a nice whiff of aroma. Sophie knew that Shana loved sweet things, and would occasionally send her favorite snacks over to Shana.

If it were normal, Shana would open the food package and enjoy the food as she read the letter (though it would be a letter uncouth), however, the food became a secondary concern.

She picked up the letter on the cookie jar and quickly ripped the seal open.

On opening the letter, she found that the content was a bit more than those letters with a seasonal introduction. There were trails of flowing-water-like handwriting in English (once she started writing, she would subconscious include all sorts of foreign vocabulary like French, Latin, but Shana didn't have any difficulty with them as she learned them before). The opening of Sophie's first letter mentioned that her work was slightly easier than before, and she even joked that it's best for Shana and the other two to go over and help her out. Next, the

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letter mentioned the results and ratings of the organization reshuffling and implementing of the suggestions Shana gave.

Shana continued to read and nod her head naturally.

“Un.”

Whether she was able to take action according to logic, and whether she was able to fulfill her duty when executing this, these were pure facts written on the letter. Amongst it, there were some occasion explanation by the ‘Crimson Lord’ that gave Sophie power, the ‘Thunder Blade of Banishment’ Takemikazuchi who had wisdom that far surpassed humans.

“Un.”

Shana finished reading it as well, and remembered those words in her heart.

Then, there was a huge blank at the bottom of the envelop.

The newly opened letter talked about another topic.

To Shana, that was the most important thing.

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The reply to this report.

“...”

Of course, Shana did not write that with her emotions. She just wrote the events that happened during this past year in the city as a series of facts from her own viewpoint, that's all.

“But if it were Sophie, that outstanding woman who once educated her, she would most likely detect something, right?” Shana was looking forward to it as if she was fawning over. She knew that it was a sign that she were growing weary and breaking down emotionally ...no, she did that because she knew.

On the last piece of paper, the reply to the letter that wasn't written in the form of a query nor a call for help had a line on it,

“Stop lying to yourself. It's time for you and you to piece two into one.”

Just two simple lines.

“Lying, to myself?”

---

The two sentences that were written on the other piece of paper was obviously aimed at answering her troubles.

But there seemed to be no specifics at all. It was just like adding to the muddle.

“I and...myself?”

Shana put down the letter and started to think. However, she couldn't even understand the meaning of the words, let alone get the answer. Since she based her fundamentals through substantive things, she couldn't handle these hypothetical thinking and views. She leaned her body on the table, seemingly unable to endure this heavy distress.

(I'm, I'm definitely myself.)

Shana flipped her hand in front of her eyes, and the 'Yogusa' appeared on the sleeve for a while before disappearing immediately. At this moment, a small box appeared on her hand.

It was a rattan box that had colorful paper put all over it—her secret box.

Whenever she was troubled about something, she would take this out and play with it on her hand out of habit.

(The letter's full of things I don't understand.)

She thought, and sighed.

There should be a letter here, but it disappeared now.

To the sender, that letter was just like that, and he would most likely forget about it. But Shana still remembered. And it was because it disappeared and she tried her best to refresh it in her memory and not lose it.

Would Sophie's letter be a reply about that thing that disappeared?

(I don't know...but.)

Even if Sophie were here now, it's unlikely that she would say the meaning behind those words. Having realized Shana's troubles, she just made a response of 2 sentences. This means that she was trying to tell her that this was all she could do. Even the 'Bold Mother's had a limit to her kindness.

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Shana played with the box in her hand.

(Who should I ask?)

On thinking about this, she immediately gave up.

The closest person to her would be Alastor, but it didn't feel right to ask him about how to live with humans. And also, since he was her father, senior, teacher and friend, it would be too embarrassing for a girl to reveal her own heart in such a bare manner.

Also, Wilhelmina was in a rather delicate situation in this case. The disappeared boy caused a change in the perfect Flame Haze 'Flame-Haired Burning-Eyed Hunter', and as one of her guardians, she felt really unhappy about it. She shouldn't be a suitable person to understand her thoughts.

And she just couldn't say it to Yoshida Kazumi, who was dejected like her, and Sakai Chigusa and Ogata Matake, who were ordinary people who don't know 'the truth to this world'.

(Discuss...)

Shana suddenly remembered Ogata's situation.

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Only one person would be very suited to do ‘such a thing’.

Though there was such a person, Shana was hesitant about discussing things through with her.

And to her own pride, she felt really unhappy about it.

But even so, there was no better person to talk to.

She hesitated for a while, and then held onto the little box tightly.

(I can only do that then.)

The girl made the decision as if she left it all to fate.

During the past two weeks, Yoshida Kazumi tried to keep her heart calm. Even when it was serious, even when the boy, who was the main support and core of her life, disappeared, she continued to do that.

During the night of Christmas Eve, Shana brought her to look at the boy’s empty room. She was completely lost before she could even let her tears out. On the next day,

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she got the letter that was sent back, and ran to the Sakai residence. However, her expectations were crushed completely as Sakai Chigusa just invited her in on the condition that she was 'Shana-chan's friend'.

He disappeared. He won't come back again—this cruel fate just had to happen when the woman who proposed of ways to improve her relationship with him. Yoshida was about to lose herself.

Just when that impact nearly crushed her completely, Shana mentioned the meaning of the letters that were sent to them, and the little hope that were hidden in them. At that moment, she finally cried, and Shana didn't

Having went through so much, she finally recovered.

That calm felt like she used willpower to hold back the feelings that were fluctuating.

This never changed, whether it was when they were discussing about the disappearance of the boy at the end of last year, or when she spent her days at home blankly during January, or when they found that he wasn't in the classroom when they went to school that they didn't go to for a long time.

But now,

She started to walk into the kitchen subconsciously,

She started to open the cupboard subconsciously,

She started to take the things out subconsciously.

(--)

And then, she finally realized that she took the wrong things out, and collapsed.

(--)

She was going to start normal lessons from the next day onwards.

She was preparing a bento for that.

It was out of habit.

And now he's not here.

(--u!!)

She collapsed when she realized that there was no need for “two” bentos.

She suddenly felt the urge to cry, and barely made it to the chair behind her and sits down.

Holding tightly onto the last ounce of hope Shana delivered, she finally managed to endure it.

At this moment, she saw the cooking book that was wrapped in colored plastic.

She herself liked to cook, and after getting a purpose to cook for him, she liked it even more. She started to gain courage to challenge herself, even if they were dishes she couldn’t cook, or never did before, or never even heard of. In the end, she practically did all the dishes recorded in him, and she tried to understand and learn all the explanations just to explain it to him.

Everyone even had a birthday party here before, and she cooked for them. Everyone, including her little brother repaid her with their own ways, and even took photos together in the end. He acted as the groom, and

she acted as the bride in this photo. That photo, however, became one with everyone surrounding the bride and an empty place, an unnatural scene.

Having been positioned in the place he once existed in, she was clearly reminded of the fact that he wasn't around. Also, like a side effect, the happy memories, the days that wouldn't be here again, they were summoned from the bottom of her heart.

--Saying hello to him when they head to school, discussing about homework, helping to do student duty, or being helped, laughing together about some normal stuff, hearing him say that the bento she made was delicious, explaining the dishes, feeling ashamed when people use that to tease her, hearing him call her when they move to other classes to attend lessons, feeling completely nervous after school as she talked to him after school, borrowing an umbrella during a rainy day, and going to many places, whether it's the date, the next date, or even the conflict that surrounded him, and even the hard battle against the Crimson Denizens—

She felt like she was running away from the tilted flow in her heart. However—

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(--“He didn’t disappear”--)

She was interrupted by a strong call that wasn’t really a shout.

(--“He didn’t disappear, definitely”--)

After receiving the letter that was sent back, she met Shana at the Sakais’ house, who called her.

(--“If he really disappeared, this wouldn’t be sent back”--)

That was a minor fact that could be said logically, thought barely.

(--“Yes, with this still in my hands, I will believe”--)

Yoshida repeated the words Shana swore to her.

(Believe.)

That’s all she could do now.

But if she did this, she could let Shana, who could do everything else, who could perhaps grab a clue, who could perhaps save him, strengthen her heart, even for

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just a bit. This realization and belief was definitely there, as love rivals, and as friends.

She couldn't stand up from the chair, but she looked up in a determined manner.

(I will...)

In her heart, the power of yearning and love continued to burn in her.



As proof, her neck still had that thing hanging on her.

A Greek Cross that's as big and long as a coin.

The 'Giralda' that a Crimson Lord entrusted to her—to her now, this would be the only treasure tool that could help Shana and the rest, at the highest possible cost.

(I must continue to hold it.)

It wasn't to be a memorabilia, and neither was it meant to be a memory and proof to believe in his existence...or even a realization. She readied herself to use it without hesitation in order to save him, and she continued to hold it in her hand.

(Please, you must remain alive.)

Yoshida held onto the pendant tightly, hoping that this voice could reach his heart.

Also, this was the only thing Yoshida could do to him.

(That would be enough.)

The girl didn't know the meaning behind the prayer.

---

Deep into the night, at the Satous' residence with the chilly winds blowing all around.

In a corner of this spacious mansion, the Japanese-style garden in the winter, there was a Fuzetsu covering it.

This was a night training ground for Flame Hazes, requested by Shana, convinced by Wilhelmina, and agreed by Margery unwillingly. During the past two weeks, they extended the habit they had when the boy was still in Misaki City, and trained at midnight.

They chose Satou's house garden so that they didn't need to go so far out. Wilhelmina would set up the Fuzetsu, and the famous Jizaiho master would train Shana, the 'Flame-Haired Burning-Eyed Hunter', in the ways of the Jizaiho.

So in this place, it looked like there were 3 people, but rather, there were six Flame Hazes over there. Also, Satou, who was about to head to Outlaw, was present as a bystander. Ever since this training started, he would watch from the sidelines no matter whether he was able

to help out. It's said that this would be a show of determination on his part, not to give up on any chance where he could interact with 'the truth to this world'.

Thus, Shana and Wilhelmina allowed him on the context that he won't interfere with the training, and Margery and Marchosias didn't say anything as they had other things on their mind, and left him on his own.

And right now, Satou was standing on the side of the gourd-shaped lake—

“UWOOOHH...!!”

He gasped when he saw the might and majesty of those burning eyes.

At the middle of the stone bridge that crossed the lake, Shana reached her left hand out and raised it to the sky.

“—Fu—”

A peaceful and stable breath was exhaled from her mouth.

Bright red firedust appeared over her head like snowflakes in reverse as they danced out of her hands.

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The starry glow form a vortex above the 'Flaming-haired Burning Eyed Hunter's head. The firedust that were reflected on the water surface gradually flowed in a single direction, and started to form a pale silhouette of an object.

It was a flaming arm that's about 20m long.

Standing beside Satou, Margery, who's covered in the luxurious coat of fur, nodded her head and muttered,

"You basically foremed it now."

"Haha—! Looks like you don't need time to gather your concentration now, Missy."

The treasure tool 'Grimoire' that's tucked under Margery's right armpit shook, as Marchosias let out a cheer.

However,

"It's not good enough."

Shana denied her results with just one sentence.

“I hope to attach some stability at this size so that I can at least swing this about.”

At that moment, she bend down and swung her sword

Following her motion, the bright red arm with the burning vortex grazed the grounds of the garden. The entire arm was slower than her quickdraw, and it bent slightly like a tree in a typhoon.

“HIII!?”

After that, Satou realized that he cried out meaninglessly, as he was unable to react to this motion, and the arm swung at him without affecting him, causing him to blush.

Of course, he didn't have any remorse or negative feelings like 'I'm not as good as them', but a positive 'I'm still not matured enough' was engraved in his heart.

(Amazing...)

Looking closely, as the gigantic arm grazed past the pasture, the tree branches and stones, in a blizzard-like

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baptism bright red firedust, there wasn't any burns or wreckage.

(They were definitely burned by the fire...maybe, maybe that's a fire the eyes couldn't see, but a physical object that's to be held and used as a hitting object.)

But the girl, who was the user of it, seemed like she couldn't take that minor lag and the very little curve.

"If I want to use it, I can only maintain it at half the size. I need to make it smaller to maximize the destructiveness."

"So you think that this won't do?"

Satou accurately deduced her thoughts.

Shana nodded her head slightly, and answered with strong realization,

"Un, I have to be stronger, so that I can take on "anything"."

"...!"

The girl didn't notice the boy's amazement as she raised her arm again to remove the silhouette of flames.

The bright red firedust danced and scattered away like the snow. She's only using the firedust to form objects because she's trying her best not to go all out in training.

Margery had a few conditions when she agreed to supervise this. One of them was that once Shana used up more power than she could recover, they would stop the training immediately, and Margery would be the one deciding it. To the Flame Hazes, who have to be stationed on the battlefield and couldn't let their guard down, they should try their best not to spend too much energy.

Even so, as the Jizaiho required actual feeling to use, Shana had to continue to use it. While learning the specifics of it, she would continue to learn how to control the firedust, and the other two would occasionally show how it's done when necessary to guide her, and that was the reason why they chose this method.

Even now, the 'Chanter of Elegies' said,

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“The reason it bended was because your senses couldn’t grasp the size of it. Once you understand what would happen when you enlarge yourself, that error can be eliminated.”

“Well, basically, try to use it more to and get used to it, heehee!”

The voice came with softness and hardness.

Shana again nodded her head and raised the gigantic arm that was formed.

Having a few years of experience as a Flame Haze, she used the opportunity of living during the past few months to make use of the fuel that wouldn’t be exhausted, the ‘Mystes’ boy with the ‘Reiji Maigo’, and continued to look for ways to use her own ability. The Crimson red wings that she developed in battle, the nodachi that were formed by flames, and the gigantic arm she’s training to use were all huge accomplishments she managed to get during the past few months.

Normally, the Flame Haze 'Flame-Haired Burning-Eyed Hunter' only had the power of 'Punishment' that judged and punishes...the power to destroy enemies, and flames.

If used randomly, such power wouldn't look any different from the flame bullet-like things that the other Flame Hazes would form from their will to destroy. If she want to use the power she had, she had to master techniques that need to be more refined.

Wilhelmina, who's in charge of setting up the Fuzetsu here, looked up at the arm and casually said,

"Might as well decide on a name now to help you form it. How about that de arimasu?"

"Something you'll get used to."

Like usual, Tiamat followed up on what her partner said.

Alastor replied to his contractor,

"Fumm...it's not a bad idea, but for the name, this should be decided by yourself."

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“Name?”

Shana was stunned for a while, and then scattered the flames.

Normally, she had a straightforward personality where she wouldn't even thinking of bluffing. Also, after having successfully created a large sword with her flames, she didn't give it any special nor majestic name, and just called it 'Oudachi'.

“Now that you mentioned it, I...”

From her viewpoint, she didn't intend to argue or disagree with it. but even so, she wouldn't be so enthusiastic so as to think 'let's do it'.

At this moment,

“As a good example.”

Wilhelmina explained calmly.

“The power of the former 'Flame-Haired Burning-Eyed Hunter' was a name called 'Order of

Knights'. That's because to her, a symbol of power would be 'a Round of Knights charging into the enemy's ranks valiantly.'"

She said seriously to the 'Flame-Haired Burning-Eyed Hunter' she's now training.

"She used that image to form the flames of the 'Flames of Heaven', and could change the sizes at will, whether it's against an army of hundreds...but right now, that thing you're trying to develop is likely—"

"Your own preference."

She heard what Tiamat said in the end—

"!!"

Shana immediately felt that she got something.

(My own...preference.)

Not going to let go of that instantaneous realization, she immediately swung a punch at the sky.

"—HAA!!!"

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The flame hair and burning eyes danced in the air, and the thickness of the firedust remained, but the silhouette that was drawn out was brighter than before, and a bright red arm was formed. There was no lag between the time when she swung her arm and when that silhouette formed.

“I succeeded.”

The gigantic arm remained in the sky strongly, just like herself.

After deciding on the name, the night training ended.

The Fuzetsu was removed as if it merged into the sky.

“Fuua~aah, see you tomorrow...”

“Have a good night, the three of us!”

“Then, please send my regards to everyone.”

Each of them left their casual words, and the ‘Chanter of Elegies’ and Satou walked to the house.

Like usual, Wilhelmina prompted Shana to leave. Both of them patrolled Misaki City for any paranormal events, and recently, it became a habit.

“Let’s go then.”

“A regular patrol.”

However, the girl who would normally leave without hesitation refused. She hesitated for a while, but she called the woman.

“Please wait.”

“Heh?” “Haa?”

Margery and Marchosias found out that she was calling them, and inadvertently let out a surprised cry.

It’s expected that both of them would react like that. They lived in the same city for a few months, but they were only involved in battles. They shouldn’t have interacted personally. Also, that upright girl who always put her mission first would have no similarities with that woman who acts on her mood. However, that girl called the woman.

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Satou turned around too.

“What’s wrong, Shana-chan?”

Is there anything de arimasu?”

“Intention is suspicious.”

Wilhelmina and Tiamat also felt incredulous about this thing that never happened before.

“ ... ”

Shana didn’t respond as she just stared at Margery with her black pupils.

“Wha, what?”

Then, Satou turned to look at Wilhelmina.

“What is it?”

“Is there something else?”

Shana hesitated as she saw that both of them were shocked, and said,

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“...I want to talk to the ‘Chanter of Elegies’ alone, both of us.”

All three of them were even more shocked now, especially,

“Why, why are you looking for her for—”

Shana didn’t let the panicking ex-guardian of hers continue.

“That’s enough, Wilhelmina! Just go and patrol first!”

The girl started to sound even more anxious as she pushed Wilhelmina on the back to chase her away. While making this childish act, she glared at Satou.”

“Ma, Margery-san?”

Completely overwhelmed by her presence, Satou turned to look at Margery, hoping for instructions.

The woman who was called up for some reason seemed to deduce something from her attitude. Perhaps it was because she often acted as “that kind of person” ever since she came to city.

“Well, alright. It’s not like she wants to fight me.”

Marchosias heard his partner’s voice and deduced the same thing. He asked,

“Nnde, I don’t really buy it, jyou-chan?”

“If you can, I would prefer that you remain a little more discret.”

But Shana wasn’t planning to hesitate.

From her chest, Alastor who was forced to move away then, realized something and said,

“It’s about today’s letter, right?”

A lucky guess suddenly popped out.

“Un, it’s really important.”

But Shana made the decision without hesitating.

Only Wilhelmina was left staring at the girl worriedly.

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## References

1. [↑](#) A mantou is a Chinese steamed bun, usually made with wheat flour.

## Chapter 2 - Begin Action

In Shanghai, China, where the economic development was rapid.

Moving up north, at the delta river when the Yangtze River meets the west side of the Huangpu river , there was a bustling street.

This was the street at the riverbank, one of the streets that used to be amongst the strongest concession powers in Asia., commonly known as 'the Bund'.

This place used to be the center of the city, but recently , this function was transferred to the Pudong New Area on the East coast. This place kept the old western buildings that were there from the 19th century to the 20th century, and it gradually became a sightseeing landmark.

Right now, this modern street that had all sorts of unique building on it was burning.

Also, the buildings were all broken, collapsed, and thoroughly destroyed, showing a devastation.

And the people that were involved in this just remained rooted to their positions, not moving at all.

The strange emblem that's was made from yellow lines of fire included the center of the city on the other side of the river, and there was a plum pink half-sphere in the sphere, blocking out the night sky, a Fuzetsu, which explained the current situation. It's an independent space that would stop anything other than those from the 'Crimson realm'.

In the devastation, there was no movement except for the burning flames and collapse.

This catastrophe was the scar of the climax, and the epilogue of all this.

There were only a few shadows that stepped through the flames and rubble.

And a few shadows that were blocked by the thick smoke that were dancing in the air due to the scorching flames.

And also, the thousands of shadows that were lined up , surrounding the area completely.

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The place they were surrounding was a building that looked like it wanted to hide itself, being extremely delicate looking, yet looking like an Art Museum.

That was a major base for Flame Hazes, linked to Beijing and Hong Kong, and linked to the coast of China.

The headquarters of the Shanghai Outlaw Branch.

Inside the building that passed through hundreds of years, showing a certain majestic feeling in the stone walls.

An old man dragged his heavy footsteps and went up the sturdy metal stairs that linked to the underground. He's wearing a western suit that's obviously made of high quality cloth, and in the breast pocket of that western suit, there was a rune that had some glowing ancient marking. That was a proof that he was supposed to be a human who shouldn't be able to move in the Fuzetsu.

The place he walked out from is the lobby of the first floor. This place could only be accessed from the main entrance, through the Italian restaurant and the 3

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security doors. It was a tightly secure space. This place had a luxurious palace-like rotated corridor in the second level, and it was the unique characteristic of what used to be the mob.

In the middle of that large corridor, a woman with her arms folded was waiting for him with her back facing him.

She wasn't tall, but she had a slender figure that felt full of force, and that could be seen through that fitting suit. The red belt that's tied on her jacket and waist, together with the Chinese sword swayed in the air, vaguely affirming that the woman wasn't an existence in a painting.

The woman didn't look back as she just stared at the corridor in front of her. The enemy was right at the entrance, asking in a high pitched and clear voice.

“Is the underground bunker sealed up?”

She didn't ask 'is there only you'. Her battle experience, couple with the presences, told her the answer. The old man who walked up from the underground from was the last survivor. She knew that already.

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The old man walked to her slowly, and answered,

“Yes. After Fan Xun-sama collapsed the underground tunnel with the last of his strength, and the enemy was remained silent. As the outcome was decided, it seem that they won't barge in and sacrifice themselves. In that situation, everyone finally managed to push the enemy back. That's right, the invasion route was the tunnel from the underground transformer generator.”

“Is that so? I forgot that it's basic to attack a fortress from the tunnels. Or rather, I didn't expect the 'Denizens' to use it. It was my carelessness. Though it was a raid, I didn't think that it would be a decisive siege. So easily broken through, and it's the headquarters we had for a long time; now that's really embarrassing.”

As the one warrior who controlled all the forces in this battle, the woman said those vengeful words bitterly.

The great battle between the Flame Hazes and Crimson Denizens occurred with the streets of Shanghai as the stage. As they were fighting on equal numbers, normally speaking, the fighters defending the base should be in the advantage, and the Denizens who were fighting from who were fighting from afar should be in a

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disadvantage; this should be common knowledge. Also, the fighters were all prepared to fight back, and the advantage was even clearer.

But this ended up being the outcome.

The Denizens who swarmed in at the beginning of the battle used continuous attacks, coordination, a thirst to win and clever strategy to crush the fighters' lines in less than one night.

The siege that was started with the expectation to recover was messed up due to the underground raid, and they couldn't attain their goal anymore. Even though the remaining fighters fought valiantly as their perimeter gradually shrunk, they started dying one after another in the commotion. Though they managed to stop the current underground invasion underground, the old man was the only survivor left.

This was a complete defeat, an utter mess.

The old man expressed his apology through his voice and his actions.

““We, we couldn't defend because we didn't know... when we expanded the underground tunnels, we should

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have invited the fighters to come and watch. It's our fault , the Kuilunhui."

"No, besides, for the past hundreds of years, we passed all the work to the elders and the other members of the Kuilunhui. It'll be too arrogant on your part if you continue to chide yourself."

From the sword that's tied on the belt at the waist of the woman.

"Enough with the trivial stuff, Xiang Xin. How's the orders we gave you?"

A male voice could be heard in an old manner. It's because of this problem that they didn't attack, and continued to defend this lobby near the stairs.

The old man called Xiang Xin bent his body forward and answered,

"Please relax, Di Hong-sama. The Fuzetsu's really big, so there was still some time until the end of the building. According to the report of the one who discovered it. The explosive opening of the secret area was already kept in a still state. Once the fuzetsu's removed, they would all die off like withered flowers."

Fufufu. The woman laughed heartily.

“There weren't any signs that our information machines were taken away up till today, but we have no need to keep them anyway. Let's create as much trouble for them as possible.”

Xiang Xin finally reached the woman, looked at the side of her face, and chuckled,

“Yes, however...”

“?”

“I never dreamt that we had to use that ridiculous 'self-destruct' mechanism'.”

“Ahh, me too.”

The woman smiled too.

Noticing the beautiful face of the warrior that never changed ever since he met her, Xiang Xin felt honored as he narrowed his eyes. Then, he felt remorse about letting her fall into such a predicament.

“I'm really sorry, Di Hong-sama, Yu Xuan-sama.”

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On hearing his words, the Flame Haze Yu Xuan didn't shake up, whether in her pose or her eyes, as she asked softly,

“Hn?”

“We temporarily moved from the center of Shanghai, and we set up forces in ambush before receiving the command to move out. We didn't listen to Miss Sawallisch's orders and gathered our surrounding forces to take on the enemy...we, the Kuilunhui, made this decision...”

Even after hearing his remorse, Yu Xuan didn't waver.

The Outlaw Branches from China to South-East Asia had a different element from the other branches that were led by someone with supernatural power, like the 'Kubelik's Orchestra'. They were formed by only humans, with the Kuilunhui society at the top of a traditional system.

Of course, they kept their base at the same place to support Flame Hazes and allow them to exchange information, but the fighters were all wanderers, and very few of them would remain in the same place. As

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there wasn't any exceptional talent like Dorel in this city, decisions tend to be done by people who were born locally (and the higher-ups would be called 'elders').

Normally, this system could work well, but recently, there was some chaos ordinary people couldn't detect, including the destruction of the Outlaw headquarters and several important bases, and thus they went off their rhythm.

Of course, the 'Kuilunhui' had their own reasons.

The few Flame Hazes who neglected affairs and thoroughly ignored them, except for the 'Performer of Depressing Dreams' Dorel Kubelik who had that special sense, they were all killed due to the sudden attacks. After that, the leadership of the Outlaw Branches in Europe had infighting of between Flame Hazes and humans for the right to lead.

As an expected outcome, they had practical problems like mistakes and stoppages in information exchange and contacts, and the situation continued to worsen. The victim of this disadvantage, East Asia, started to be more cautious as they tried not to get involved in the power struggle in Europe. In fact, there were a lot of humans

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and fighters asking the 'Kuilunhui' and their members for help in regards to all sorts of things.

They witnessed their duty being interrupted by such turmoil, and their distrust of Europe heightened , which was to be expected.

After a short while, the main command of Europe realized the stupidity of the in-fighting, and invited the hero of the war, the 'Braider of Trembling Might' Sophie Sawallisch, to clear the mess up. However, this choice ended up making things even more complicated, and even created a 'logical loophole'.

On a certain day, with Sophie leading the charge, the fighters declared from Europe to everywhere in the world that they would 'create a new temporary battle situation'. This included a sentence to all the Outlaw branches and fighters, one with a powerful intent. It was aimed at the attacks of the Outlaw branches that were attacked, and the rationale behind them were logical and warranted.

However, the 'Kuilunhui' couldn't accept this request because of what happened. Also, they even felt that this forced change in command was just an excuse to drag

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their frontlines, and even felt that this was Europe's unjust way of meddling with their traditional organization system.

The fighters that belonged to this city, and those who often came to visit mentioned that 'we need assistance during this time', 'Europe isn't that ambitious that we need to worry about'. However, the elders of the ' Kuilunhui accepted Europe's command in another way and responded through action.

In other words, they went to set up a perimeter in the East Asia region to capture the mysterious attackers, and lure them all in before destroying them at one go; their independent action.

They chose important bases that's easy to gather their fighters, using them as bait to lure the big fish, namely Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Just like that, they set up a surveillance network throughout China, and also completed the perfect bait and army. Those methods alone would be a masterpiece. They launched small scaled battles everywhere, using both defeats and victories to seal off the frontlines and lock onto the enemy's position. They would then gather

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the power of almost every Flame Haze at the designated destination, Shanghai, before launching the overall counterattack.

They, the 'Kuilunhui' that leads the Outlaw branch of East Asia, were really outstanding in mobilizing and leading the military forces and the Flame Hazes under them. Even though they took action at such a grand-scale for once after many centuries ago (though with the help of modern technology), it's obvious that they were able to organize themselves really well.

However, they made two mistakes.

First, their intention to gather and break through was what the enemy expected to do.

Second, at the crucial battle of Shanghai, they suffered a complete defeat.

Without Europe knowing, the powerful fighters in East Asia were almost subdued completely.

The sound of buildings collapsing can be heard, though it's unknown whether it came from nearby or from afar, causing the lobby to tremble slightly.

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Feeling the impact of the destruction, Xiang Xin continued to remorse.

“We doubted Europe, but it’s not like we didn’t have the urge to control our fighters and use our own ability to win. We trusted in the ‘Kuilunhui’s decision, and trusted in the fact that Yu Xuan-sama and Di Hong-sama —”

“That’s enough.”

The ribbon that’s tied on the sword swayed slightly, and Di Hong interrupted him.

“Stop making excuses for us, Xiang Xin. It’s really embarrassing.”

“That’s true. Even though we set up our formations, we were careless and let the enemy attack us from our weak points, resulting in our loss. Isn’t that enough?”

It’s because their lives were about to end that Yu Xuan said that in a frivolous manner.

It’s because she was like this that he was so enamored with her. Thinking about this, the old man chuckled.

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"It's true, I guess. We're barely able to handle the pressure. We managed to let the other elders retreat to somewhere other than the Shanghai headquarters. We should be happy about doing that."

"Actually, I was really hoping that you would go along with them."

Yu Xuan continued to look forward, as there seemed to be an abnormal feeling in her voice.

This time, it's Xiang Xin's turn to grin.

"I won't let anyone have the position to be to be with you. And there are fighters here who don't know how to use some installation...and most importantly, I'm here because you're here. Isn't that enough?"

"Really, you."

Hearing Di Hong say this, Yu Xuan finally lowered her head and chuckled.

"The same old bad habit from when you were a red little youth...that mouth that doesn't know when to stop still hasn't been cured."

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“Bishounen. If possible, I would like you to call me that.”

Like usual, Xiang Xin’s talkative mouth answered back

After laughing out loud.

Yu Xuan again looked forward.

“The underground situation should reach the enemy now. I’m going.”

She looked like she was gathering strength and momentum, ready to make her last stand.

“Please show off as much as you want.”

But unlike what he said, Xiang Xin was standing in front of Yu Xuan.

The old man remembered the half century he spent together with her.

At that time, the reckless Xiang Xin felt angered and jealous at this woman, who roamed the streets of the poor with that luxurious attire that didn’t fit in at all, and

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more importantly, the face of that fearless and mighty person—just like now—and then stepped in front of her to stop her, intending to exert violence on her.

Of course, the outcome didn't need to be described... just one hit, the red boy was hit right in the middle of the face with a punch, and he was sent flying back.

He could still clearly remember the hot and bloody feeling that time.

And he closed his eyes to let her send him off in the same way.

Since they knew each other for so long, even if it was just this action, she should be able to understand the meaning behind it.

Naturally, it's impossible for him to escape (the prepared tunnels that were used by the enemies were supposed to be used for escape). Even if he remained here, he would just be crushed into minced meat by the rubble of the buildings in the battle, or devoured by the 'Denizens'. If that's the case, he could only choose one path.

However,

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“!?”

A completely unexpected touch from what he was ready and expecting to feel came from his lips.

Shocked as he widened his eyes, he saw Yu Xuan close to him, smiling at him.

The head that was extremely shocked let out a surprised look, and the sharp blade immediately flew by, slicing it off.

“Idiot, why must you die with such an expression?”

Seeing the head of the man who loved her roll on the floor, Yu Xuan said her final farewells.

“IT’S OUT!!”

The spider that immediately shouted got sliced in half immediately.

Breaking through the scattered firedust, Yu Xuan went up the wall of the Shanghai Outlaw Branch, that art deco-like atmosphere, to the roof.

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Blocking her way out were a bat-man, a western armor and 3 skeletons.

“IT’S THE HORSEMAN! TAKE HER OUT!”

“DON’T LET HER GET AWAY!”

“IT’S THE TOP GENERAL!!”

The moment each of them called out, they were quickly sliced down in 2, 2, 3 godspeed slashes of the sword.

During the time Yu Xuan swung her sword, a large number of enemies could be seen on the Bund, at the bottom and roofs of the buildings, ready to swarm over.

(It’s modern times now, and yet they could gather so many forces.)

Facing the metallic block monster that broke the wall from the front, Yu Xuan gathered half a second of energy and sliced the armor horizontally in half. She evaded the huge body of that thing that was falling down, and finally sees a burning sky full of smoke, and the little roof gardens the Outlaw members created for entertainment.

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(And these people are actually—)

She leaped up and stood on the stone at the side of the garden.

“!”

And saw two legs and a spear tip shoot out from the railing of the pavilion.

Someone was actually at the pavilion, sleeping in a crude manner with his legs out in the midst of a battle.

There was no need to sense who that tremendously strong presence was from, as Yu Xuan was extremely clear about who this person was. The words she was thinking about came out as a voice unknowingly.

“—Guys from ‘Bal Masque’.”

Unexpectedly, right over there was the real identity of the enemy who attacked the Outlaw branches all over the world.

That person raised his legs up high as if he heard himself being summoned, and stamped hard on the pavement.

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Picking up the spear as he stood up, the man slowly walked forward.

“Really, how can you guys go over first when you’re only supposed to be watching?”

That wasn’t aimed at the Flame Haze in front of him, but to his ‘Denizen’ underlings, as a general of this force. The man stepped onto the stone pavement at the exit of the garden, and showed himself.

The shades that blocked his eyes, the platinum hair that was combed into a bun, and the tall figure that’s draped in a black suit. He spun his weapon busily, the dark-colored spear that’s more than twice his height, as if he was ready to get into action. The cigarette in his mouth was covered in muddy purple flame, and turned into dust.



The man and woman behind him, each dressed in black and white respectively, said,

“Yes. I’m really sorry. I told them sternly before, but.”

“Please look at it as high morale in every soldier when victory is just right in front of us...”

One of them said in a heavy and courteous tone, and the other said that in a light-hearted laugh as both of them made their responses.

Yu Xuan ignored the two people behind her as she aimed the tip of her sword, only at the enemy general.

First, that sword spoke,

“Long time no see, Chi You...no, ‘Thousand Changes’ Sydonay. Facing against so many ferocious fighters, in a battle with such a terrain of heights and depths that we never had in the past, you were still able to, well, level them.”

And it’s the user’s turn,

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“A century and more of solo action wasn’t enough to wear off your leadership ability, is it?”

She praised the general that won with a clear tone.

The man, Sydonay, looked troubled as he smiled.

“Fuu, I really feel bad about having to lose these old acquaintances who would call me that, ‘Pennant of Dedication’ Di Hong and ‘Bladed Flower Slaughterer’ Yu Xuan.”

He smiled and spun the spear around before tucking it under his armpit, DON. Such a casual action had a tremendous power that would shake anyway who sees it . After that,

“Orobas, Lerajie, this is my guest. Don’t interfere.”

He said that to the black man and white woman behind him.

Both of them bowed politely, and took a few steps back while maintaining that position.

“Yes.”

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Understood.”

The general who won and the mighty one of the loser would be fighting one on one.

They didn’t stop this completely meaningless act which would have an unpredictable outcome.

The ‘Denizen’ Army that was ready to attack as they surrounded the tower didn’t even talk to each other privately, let alone invade the building. They just stood around silently and watched the scene in front of them. That’s because they had full confidence in their general’s strength.

Yu Xuan didn’t think that the enemy belittled her. This general, ‘Thousand Changes’ Sydonay, was one of the Trinity leading ‘Bal Masque’, and he did have a tremendous power that they could believe in.

However, the Flame Haze ‘Bladed Flower Slaughterer’ who was called a top-notched fighter in the Eastern side,

“Let’s go, Di Hong.”

“Ou.”

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Were about to use this confidence and trust in him to take revenge, at the very least, and go all out in battle.

The belt that's wrapped on the waist gradually turn into plum red firedust that dances into the wind before disappearing, and then, it was the sheath, then, the sword itself, and the body. Just like that, the bottom half of the body gradually disappeared like flower petals, leaving onto the shoulders and head of Yu Xuan, who declared the release of her own power with a calm expression.

--'Shashin Kensei'--

At that moment, the remaining lower half of the body was blown away, and the firedust became a plum red aurora. The sword-shaped treasure tool 'Kun Wu' was the only thing remaining there, covered in elegant patterns as the aurora grabbed it on the hilt.

That's a plum red aurora of a deity, in an elegant ritualistic mode.

This was what the 'Bladed Flower Slaughterer' was so proud of, the 'Shashin Kensei' battle mode that used the treasure tool 'Kun Wu' as the core of battle.

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"I'm going, Di Hong."

"Mu."

The moment he responded, the sword flew at Sydonay

It was a powerful stab that didn't have any swinging motion, seemingly using the aurora as the exhaust as it shot out firedust.

"!"

Sydonay dodged in relax. The high temperature aurora grazed past his body, burning off the shoulder part of the suit. While dodging, he suddenly accelerated, wielded the far end of the 'Shintetsu Nyoï' and thrust out.

Just when it was about to touch him, as the sword as grazed slightly, the 'Kun Wu' was immediately knocked away into another direction, but within several seconds, the red plum aurora that rose from beside him again formed itself as a deity and caught it--

"You dodged and caught it huh?"

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“As expected of you, Chi You.”

After saying that, she floated in the air for several seconds, before striking down like an avalanche together with the aurora.

Looking up at the hot aurora with the spinning sword as the core, Sydonay,

“Fuu.”

Inhaled some air and started to change shape.

The right half of the body that was wielding the spear maintained its human form, and the left half of the body expanded. What appeared was a human's right half connecting the front of the tail, a cricket that looked like a dinosaur.

The 'Kun Wu' continued to spin, and touched the thick scales of the head.

“Guu!”

As Sydonay looked up in surprise, another attack came and sliced the cricket's head vertically. The scorching hot aurora intended the wound through the

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head, immediately turning the insides and outsides of the cricket into chars.

On the rooftop garden that felt the aftershock of the attack.

“IT'S hot!”

Sydonay barely managed to jump away from this sliced part, and the 'Kun Wu' used a godspeed stab to attack Sydonay, who's left with half his body.

(I win—uu?)

However, that sliced surface immediately formed a mouth with numerous sharp teeth, and was slowly closing as according to the stab. Just when Yu Xuan hesitated,

(Use the ground!)

Di Hong's quick words could be heard.

The 'Kun Wu' and the plum red aurora changed its trajectory slightly and went down, and the scorching destruction broke through the thin soil on the rooftop garden, breaking down to the bottom.

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Seeing that the enemy moved away from him, Sydonay easily regenerated the other half of his body as if he was breathing, and swung the 'Shintetsu Nyoï' up.

At this moment, Yu Xuan took the initiative and pierced through the floor, stabbing the tip of the sword at his face.

“!”

Sydonay bent backwards to dodge this attack, and then swung a spear thrust out as payback.

*The plum red aurora was blown away.* Just when he thought that, the aurora again gathered to form the deity wielding the sword.

Seeing the sharp sword again thrusting down from above his head, Sydonay blocked it with the grip of the spear at the critical moment.

Both of them exerted their full strength to hold off the enemy,

“Yu Xuan, you're really lucky. Now I can let you witness the full power of the 'Shintetsu Nyoï'.”

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Just when both of them were glaring at each other from such a short distance, the shades split into half and dropped onto the floor.

“Is that so? Then, Chi You, I'll pay you back with the 'Shashin Kensei's utmost ability.”

“HERE WE GO!”

With Di Hong's voice as the signal, both of them immediately exerted force on their hands and pulled their distance from each other.

The deity that changed into an aurora started dancing gracefully as she went past the burning rooftop, moving her arms and making them fly about. She flew high above the roof before removing that state. The 'Kun Wu' in the middle started to spin and accelerate until the aurora became a flat cylindrical vortex.

Suddenly, that vortex slanted as it turned the spinning cutting side to the roof of the Shanghai Outlaw branch, and charged at the general of 'Bal Masque'.

That vortex went down on Sydonay, who looked up at it,

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“!!”

Moving at a breakneck speed, she easily crushed him into the room. Also, the remaining shockwaves even pierced through the entire building, piercing all the way to the ground.

The 'Denizen' Army watching the one on one were all stunned, or that's how they looked.

During the few seconds after the shockwaves disappeared, the building that had a large chunk blown off down the middle slanted as if it were moaning, and started to collapse slowly.

The sharp aurora blade that danced in the air quickly reverted back to the deity form, as Yu Xuan and Di Hong watched their magnificent destruction,

“How's that...?”

“The presence—”

But before they could finish.

“It was a fine move...but unfortunately, it's not able to touch my heart and life.”

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“WHAT!!”

“KUU!!”

Like the vertical slash just now, 'Thousand Changes' Sydonay maintained a block and stood over there proudly. The spear 'Shintetsu Nyoï' was raised in his hand, without a single scratch at all.

“Impossible.”

“To be...completely unscathed...”

Seeing both of them in shock, the man who wasn't taken down let out a sharp gaze and voice.

“The treasure tools for us Trinity were specially made. This 'Shintetsu Nyoï' will never bend nor break as long as my will doesn't allow for it, and when I do—”

The surrounding floors that were falling through the dust suddenly stopped.

At that moment, numerous eyes and mouths opened from the cracked surfaces.

The soldiers of all sizes weren't from 'Bal Masque', but were all clones of 'Thousand Changes' Sydonay. Every level in the building had a part of him, or rather, all of him.

Sydonay blocked himself, and the parts below the knees expand out as if they covered the ground, expanding until both sides of the building. This was a huge trap Sydonay set up to lure and block her, Yu Xuan only realized this after that.

“DAMN IT!”

Just when they were about to get rid of the deity form,

It was too late.

“GGUUUOOOOOOOOAAAAHHHHHHH!!!!”

With the roars of all the mouths surrounding Sydonay, an unbelievable thing happened.

Hundreds and thousands of 'Shintetsu Nyoï' that were covered in muddy purple flames extended out from both sides of the building, and stabbed in like hedgehogs. The overpowering stabs and attacks went to a single point,

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At the Flame Haze 'Bladed Flower Slaughterer's core, the treasure tool 'Kun Wu'.

At the trembling sword that took several thousand stabs by the spear.

--Hmph!"

From the front, Sydonay, who's in his human form, stabbed forward with his 'Shintetsu Nyoi'.

"KLANG!"

The tip of the sword and the tip of spear collided at a single point. At that moment, the 'Kun Wu' was completely blown into bits, and the remaining plum red aurora was swallowed by the raging purple flames, left without a trace.

Without a voice, without an expression, and without any action, Yu Xuan was taken down like that.

As if trying to replace an existence, the 'Shintetsu Nyoi' that were stabbed at a common point mixed in the flames, attracting every body in the room, and completing a position of a person with a spear.

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“The twilight of that beautiful existence of hers... showed a fall of bright flowers, is it?”

As if ending this with his words, the building that lost its support, the Shanghai Outlaw branch started to shake and the walls and pillars started to crumble as if they were buried in the rumble and dust. The extremely important base was gradually collapsing.

Several minutes later, after stepping on the last piece of fallen rock, Sydonay walked towards the street.

Behind him, Orobas and Lerajie, who hid as if it was natural, kneeled and said their congratulations.

“Congratulations, general.”

“This victory would definitely please our leader-sama.”

With this cry, the surrounding soldiers were all cheering for their general, “WWOOOHH~!... GENERAL-SAMA BANZAI!!” “WE WON! WE WWOOONNN!!” “US 'BAL MASQUE' WOULD LIVE FOREVER!” “LONG LIVE THE TRINITY!” “LONG LIVE 'THOUSAND CHANGES' SYDONAY!”

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However, Sydonay himself was looking far away, looking somewhat uninterested.

To prevent the soldiers from eavesdropping, Orobos said in a voiceless message only the three of them could hear (and he didn't say that in a way both of them could hear was because of his upright nature) to the general he so respected.

(I understand that you destroyed the treasure tool of your kind, sir, but I understand your feelings of having to killing your old acquaintance.)

(If you have something you're mindful of in the attack, sir, why don't you let everyone present here excavate the place?)

Lerajie joined in the conversation shamelessly.

Sydonay didn't mind as he said clearly with his voice,

“Heh, don't think too much. During the battle against them just now, we all enjoyed the joy of everything, including death, or maybe I should put it that way. Also, the human mechanisms or what aren't things that could

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be detected through jizaiho, so it's pointless to look too much into this. Besides, I haven't gotten an order to search Outlaw."

(Then, why—)

Orobos continued with the voiceless message.

"Why do you look so unhappy?"

Lerajie raised her doubt with her mouth.

"I'm thinking of the consequences of this battle."

After answering, Sydonay picked up the cigarette, and lit it with just a single flick of the finger.

"Whether it's 'Kuilunhui', who paid the heavy price of refusing to cooperate and take us on, or the leaders of the other areas who got this information, they would most likely submit to Europe out of fear."

Both of them finally understood the meaning of the worry he had.

"We destroyed a huge number of strategic points to make the important routes in the world remain unstable."

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We were already able to attack them singlehandedly without them preparing to attack back. It's unlikely that the next enemy will be dealt with so easily. Now's not the time to get too ahead of ourselves."

If it happened again the next time, it would be war.

The attendants who sincerely agreed with this view kneeled their bodies down with realization.

"Yes, I will make the army bigger and stronger to be more prepared for battle."

"Leave the trivial stuff to us, general-sama, and focus on the mission."

Sydonay coughed out purple flames and thought,

(Mission...that's right, I should go back to meet my Hecate and the leader-sama who finally returned.)

Right now, the 'it' that existed in his consciousness was said to have diverted from his original path, and stopped at the island country on the far East.

In the world where nobody knows, at the floating base of

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‘Bal Masque’, the moving fortress ‘Seireiden’ stopped at a certain place for a few days. Even though everyone’s presence inside would be completely isolated and covered under the use of the bubble-like world ‘Secret Sanctuary’ (Crypt), normally, this could not remain here for long.

However, nobody would care about this minor change, as now was not the time to think about it. That’s because they were all busy about something more important.

In the fortress, the Crimson Denizens who wanted to see that scene if they were lucky were all gathered here from all over the world, creating a rare crowded situation that wasn’t seen in the past several hundred years.

They let down the drawbridges of the fortress, and everywhere was filled with Denizens, whether at the high walls and the group of spires above, the stone bunker areas at the bottom, the sentry points of the soldiers. Only the secret facility in the bunker area was unfilled.

As there were many off-limits due to many reasons, they moved around in the fortress, discussing, looking

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forward to and asking about what will happen now, or in the future.

At a bar in a corner—which functioned as a rest spot that provided food, beverages and entertainment.”

“Stolas-sama!”

‘Halcyon Flight’ Stolas, who came here to enjoy a meal , was called by someone.

“Ahh, aren’t you ‘Cup of Corrupting Indulgence’ Pirsoyn?”

Stolas turned the headless body around. This Herald had winged arms, was covered with fur, had a pair of arms on the chest, and a slit mouth on the stomach. He had an entirely unusual physical appearance, not like a bird, yet not like a human. However, he had a rare gentle personality amongst the self-aware and greedy Denizens, so there were quite a few people who were friendly with him.

And the Denizen who called him from across the crowd was one of them as well.

"I heard that you went off with the general. So you came back already. Was it related to this event?"

The person who was slowly moving through the crowd that's hopping about was a kid with wide eyes, dressed in a large and loose robe with the sleeves almost hitting the floor. The large old bandit bag emphasized his small size all the more. However, he was a rather famous Jaegar, and he, together with his partner made a lot of accomplishments.

Seeing the familiar face that he hadn't seen for so long, Stolas smiled and answered,

"Nope. I came back because of general-sama's orders. What about you?"

"Of course, I'm here to see the glory...of our leader."

The 'Denizens' who were members were all gathered her for this particular reason.

Today, after a while, there would be the ceremony to welcome the return of the leader in this 'Seireiden'. Everyone came over to see that long vacated seat, and all the Denizens gathered from all over the world, having

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only heard of the rumors or didn't check if he was suitable to take the role of leader.

Pirsoyn was one of them as well, as his voice was totally filled with delight.

Stolas felt that, but pretended not to notice as he just looked around.

“Speaking of which, where's that 'Dashing Earthly Fiend' Ribesal-dono? He came here with you, irhgt?”

That Ribesal was the Wanderer who's often paired with Pirsoyn in missions. He was quite strong, but this 'Crimson Lord' was more famous for his crude demeanour and actions.

“Mu, sort of.”

Pirsoyn moved his eyes and glanced aside to indicate where he was.

“But it's best not to shock him now—”

“'HALCYON FLIGHT' STOLAS!”

The voice that interrupted him echoed with the grunts that occurred throughout the bar.

“OVER HERE. LET'S HAVE A DRINK TODAY!!”

The noisy bustling immediately stopped, and the wall of Denizens blocking them from the front formed a path. Besides, nobody wanted to get involved with this violent person who won't stop once he starts.

Stolas, who's extremely good at handling people like this, didn't look terrified as he walked through the path that was opened.

“You don't look too well. Is there something wrong?”

“What do you mean by that—”

Sitting at the table in the middle of the bar and drinking non-stop from the especially big wooden beer mug in his hand was a three-horned beetle with a body as large as an elephant. Amongst the 4 limbs, the bottom two were hugged together, and there were beads made from crystals on him.

This strange 'Lord' who wasn't much different from Stolas continued to pour honey wine into his beer mug as he continued to shout vague-sounding words,

“YOU SAW IT RIGHT!? SAYING THAT THAT WAS THE LEADER WHO RETURNED TO US...ARE YOU KIDDING ME!! ISN'T THAT THE 'MYSTES'! NO MATTER WHAT TREASURE TOOL HE HAD, NO MATTER WHAT TREMENDOUS POWER HE HAD, ONCE WE 'DENIZENS' TAKE ACTION, HE'S JUST A HUMAN SCUM WHO WOULD JUST DISAPPEAR ANYTHIME!”

Speaking halfway through, Ribesal wasn't talking to anyone else but himself already.

Stolas knew that this would happen, but still listened to him patiently. It's important for a Herald, who had to be the middleman in the organization and contact the Jaegers and Wanderers, to listen to what others had to say before speaking out.

Performing his own show now, Ribesal trembled,

“THAT GUY WHO SPROUTED FROM NOWHERE... WHY MUST OUR strategist-SAMA AND PRIESTESS BOW DOWN TO HI!” M!”

DONG! He stamped onto the floor forcefully with his talon claws.

The paved floor cracked, and the entire bar was shaken up. The ceiling dropped some dust, and some Denizens around them left the scene to prevent getting involved in the commotion. The 'Denizen' who was in charge of the bar looked at the other two people sitting together with Ribesal with pleading eyes.

(Fufu, which means—)

Stolas could easily guess the reason why he was unhappy. He tried to confirm it with his surroundings as he checked his surroundings, and found that Pirsoyn was smiling wryly as he nodded his head.

(Uu, so that's how it is.)

As a member of the organization, Ribesal was also one of the 'Crimson Lords' with tremendous power. Most importantly, he was a trusted aide of Bel Peol, and felt extremely happy and rewarded by all the missions.

But now, the commander he so obeyed knelt down in front of someone else without any resistance, as if it were normal. In this situation, those who were more loyal to the commanders would naturally be more enraged.

At this moment, Stolas looked around the surroundings, and saw that,

(So that's how it is?)

After the leader returned, there was a mysterious atmosphere from the 'Seireiden', and he felt that he understood the real reason behind it.

Even though they felt irritated by Ribesal's violent actions, nobody chided him for showing disrespect to the leader. Also, amongst the people who were casually eating and drinking away, and the people who were silently watching this commotion, there was even a sort of silent support brewing.

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(But that's to be expected anyway.)

Stolas saw 'something really shocking' when he returned.

Seeing that scene, if anyone knew that it was the leader's intention...then the 'Denizens' who swore allegiances to 'Bal masque' for hundreds or even thousands of years would feel completely angered by that unforgivable frivolous acts. They would also naturally feel unhappy that their two physical and spiritual leaders would do such a rude thing.

Even the gentle Stolas felt somewhat uneasy. It's unknown how angry those rash and short-tempered people would be.

(Also, the origin and nature wasn't really important... most of the members here don't seem to know anything about the leader, and now suddenly, they're told 'this is the leader, you must obey his commands'. It's obvious that most of us would be troubled.

Even if that wasn't the case, the 'Denizen' organizations were different from humans. They weren't built from ethics. The results of the organization led by the Trinity and the feelings they harbored was the

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driving force as to why they followed the organization. This applied to Stolas as well.

(Maybe, for today's ceremony, besides showing the existence of the leader...there's something else to it, is it?)

Ribesal then said it in another way to explain his doubts,

“AND WHAT DOES THAT SO-CALLED LEADER INTEND TO DO!? HE JUST SAID 'I'M BACK' AND RETURNED TO HIS SEAT, BUT CAN HE PUSH FOR THINGS BETTER THAN THE STRATEGIST-DONO? CAN HE UNITE US BETTER THAN THE PRIESTESS!? CAN HE DIRECT US IN BATTLE BETTER THAN GENERAL-DONO!?”

after shouting, he tilted the wine barrel to dampen his throat, but it was already empty. He then crushed the wine barrel to bits.

“DAMN IT! BRING ME THE NEXT BARREL!”

He roared at the person-in-charge of the bar with an extremely unhappy tone.

Pirsoyn finally couldn't take it as he straightened his body, tugged at the beads that's folded tightly around the stomach with the second set of arms, and calmed him down by saying,

“You're drinking too much, Ribesal. Honey wine's still wine.”

“SHUT UP, YOU! SWEET THINGS WILL MAKE ME DRUNK. THERE'S NO PROBLEMS AT ALL!”

Seeing Ribesal argue back in a way that wasn't the point, Stolas said in a gentle voice,

“Muu, there's no need to be so anxious. Why don't I report it to the higher-ups and say that there's such an atmosphere among the members? I guess if it's the strategist-dono, she'll deal with this well.”

Due to their roles, Heralds could approach the Trinity better than me. One can feel the heavy gravity in his words, and the reason why nobody could feel that he didn't just intend to make the report was because of the rapport he built up amongst the citizens.

(Also, I myself really want to ask Strategist-dono about the intention behind this.)

To him, this made him all the more interested.

Ribesal heard what should be considered a good suggestion.

“Uu...”

He started to become silent, perhaps being moved.

“That's good, Ribesal. Let's do that.”

“In this situation, Strategist-dono probably shouldn't wish for any lack of harmony within.”

He looked at the two of them who said that, but the attitude suddenly changed.

“Nope, this can't do.”

He denied it completely. And then, suddenly,

“More than that—”

He grabbed both of them.

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“WA!?”

“WHA, WHAT NOW!?”

Ribesal brought the hard-to-tell beetle face near them and chuckled as he said,

“I thought of a great idea. Anyway, come along with me.”

Of course, both of them couldn't imagine this 'great idea' he mentioned from a positive viewpoint.

Even though it looked rather flat overall, each mountain had a sharp protruding edge. This valley of hills seemed to be the specialty of this landscape. The icy and clear air showed the remaining green plants growing on the rocks , and it felt really refreshing.”

“It's mid-winter now. This season is really bad timing.”

The clothes that were extended out from the armor fluttered, and the leader spoke.

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“If it were spring, we could enjoy the beautiful blooming flowers.”

Then, a boy’s voice came from the same person, who’s standing at the edge of the cliff.

Behind ‘him’, a girl was squatting there, gently prodding the green grass that was swaying with the wind.



That was a member of the Trinity, wearing a white cap and dressed in a cloak, the Priestess, 'Master Throne' Hecate.

"It's enough. Winter has its own pleasures...and."

The girl narrowed her eyes,

"Right now, I can talk to you without needed to head to high grounds and pray for your voice. That's all, I wished for."

"Winter had its own pleasure, is it...well, that's how you endured when I wasn't around, is it?"

"..."

This time, she didn't answer the leader's words as she silently played with the green grass with her fingers.

He didn't demand for an answer, and just looked at the mountains far away.

As if bringing blessings and happiness to the two of them.

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BAAANNG!

A mysterious sound of a stringed instrument resounded throughout the mountains.

“The cold winter went just when it looked like winter, and spring arrived just when it didn’t look like spring...”

Behind the two of them, the musician sitting on the tall rock was playing a really old lute and singing. He’s a mysterious fellow, wearing a triangular hat that hid his ears and a tuxedo that had its collar up to hide his face.

“Was that a fleeting illusion, or a prank when troubled ...”

That was the ‘Denizen’ who just entered ‘Seireiden’ recently—the ‘Inviter of Satire’ Rofocale.

He was a unique existence that wouldn’t be affected, threatened or praised. He was only allowed to play the lute there.

Because of that, ‘he’ didn’t say anything now, and Hecate didn’t turn back to look at him.

“What we know is each other’s heart...”

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Even so, Rofocale continued to treat himself like the wind, or like a decoration in the wind as he played the lute a few times and sang a few songs.

After a while, a gust of wind blew, and the boy's voice said to the beauty who 'returned' here from the base."

"Bel Peol, was the Denizen just now a Herald?"

"Yes."

The member of the Trinity who had the right most of her three eyes covered, the strategist 'Arbiter of Reverse Reasoning' Bel Peol knelt gracefully on the rocky ground on one leg.

During these few days, she and Hecate accomplished their leader as they walked through the mountains and enjoyed themselves under the sun they weren't familiar with. The 'Denizens' who were gathered at 'Seireiden' were shocked to see them showing up defenseless in the outside world, and some were glaring at them. They could only grimace about that.

Though they knew that this defenseless act would attract unrest among the members and also the

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unhappiness over how they were treated, there was no room for negotiation when it was the leader's orders. They knew this act was a very important job to 'him'.

To pacify the crowd, they could only return to 'Seireiden' when there was important meetings and orders. Bel Peol herself just went back to 'Seireiden' to accept the call and report from her subordinate.

The aide lowered her head and made the most important report during these past few days.

"It's an emergency report the general 'Thousand Changes' Sydonay sent over late last night. It's said that the Outlaw branch in Shanghai had fallen. The basic preparations outside was basically over now."

"Very good. Seems like 'Thousand Changes' ability's hasn't decreased at all while I wasn't around."

The leader praised with one voice,

"Right now, the Flame Haze camp would likely gather their forces to take care of the situation and be wary of the opposing forces, so they shouldn't have enough power to set a perimeter. I can then head to her safely without too much interference."

The boy's voice continued.

Bel Peol continued to lower her body and asked the leader above her,

"Also, will you be leading us?"

"Of course."

The leader answered immediately.

"The only one who could hinder the progress of our plans is the God of Judgment, 'Flames of Heaven'...you should know that very well."

The boy's voice explained.

Bel Peol's expression changed, and she asked again.

"Will you do it?"

The leader didn't immediately answer to this doubt that could be interpreted into many different ways.

In the chilly winds of the mountains that had mist all over, under the occasionally bright sunlight, only the sound of clothes fluttering could be heard as the lack of an answer felt extremely long.

Deep inside, Bel Peol felt somewhat uneasy.

That was a feeling she developed when she saw the actions of the returned leader.

The instrument that was prepared for the return for the king wasn't supposed to be this residue, the 'Mystes', but rather, a more stable medium called 'the Tyrant', a receiving equipment.

However, the reason it became like this...that the leader was controlling the body together with the 'Mystes' was because of the owner's own will. That's because he became interested in the boy, who became the host of the treasure tool 'Reiji Maigo' that was moved and stored in him after a few months, and made the decision after deciding that the boy had the same thoughts and wish as him.

Even though it deviated from the original plan, there weren't any problems now. Also, his actions and words

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had no hesitation or perplexity in them as he showed off the same overwhelming presence like before.

But two special things happened that exceeded their expectations.

One. For some reason, he had abnormal insight.

Two. The voice that he let out was that of the leader and the boy mixed together, which means that they were combined.

That was a thoroughly strange phenomenon that nobody could explain logically, whether it was Hecate, who reclaimed the leader from afar by creating a spell, or the 'Seeking Researcher' Dantalion, who analyzed and operated it.

(Also, without testing whether they worked, he operated so many complicated spells immediately. It's no wonder that such an obstacle would occur...)

Perhaps it was because of this that he immediately ordered the changed in plans.

In other words, to deal with the ‘God of Judgment’, who ruled over judgment and punishment—the ‘Flames of Heaven’ Alastor.

To explain it further, it’s to deal with the contractor, the Flame Haze ‘Flaming-Hair Burning eyed Hunter’, the existence that had a close relationship with the leader when he was a ‘Mystes’. Was this correction out of the leader’s consideration or the boy’s personal feelings? As the benefits of the action and their personal intentions were extremely similar, it was hard to tell his really intention.

They already considered about how to go about dealing with it, and the preparations were all ready. But at the critical moment, could ‘he’ do it? If ‘he’ couldn’t, would ‘he’ collapse like that?

Their royal lives as ‘Bal Masque’ may look sailing, but they were actually rushing through with the thing they were least certain of. It would be obvious that the ever-cautious her would be uneasy.

(Really, things just can’t be smooth sailing.)

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However, the dark clouds over her heart didn't make her unhappy. On the contrary, she felt delighted. Amongst the 'Denizens' who lived by the rule of 'living to one's own will', she was the only one who felt that 'it's because it's not smooth sailing that there's worth to challenge it.

(That's right. With regards to this unpredictable situation, I prepared something...once that's done, it's not too late to break it down and analyze it slowly.)

Right now, this 'Lord' with a lot of tricks and plans wasn't mocking herself, but feeling delighted in a complicated and weird way.

(I'm really a lost cause.)

At this moment, on seeing her like this,

"It's not whether I can do it or not."

The leader's voice could be heard as he closed in,

"It's just that I have to do it. That's all."

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After saying that in the boy's voice, he stood in front of Bel Peol.

Then, the leader smiled to her and said,

"It was the same in the past. I feel like I troubled you a lot, always relying on that 'joy' of yours, and brought you lots of suffering. I'm really a leader who doesn't know how to empathize with others."

Seeing that the leader grasped her heart correctly, Bel Peol looked somewhat happy and anxious, and hid her face by lowering it.

"But that's—"

At that moment, the boy casually held her hand.

"But I won't fail again. I have to succeed for you all."

"—!?"

The hand with a slow and graceful force caused her to stand up.

The leader looked at her, who showed a stunned look that nobody saw before.

“A little human’s body isn’t too bad.”

The boy used his fingers to stroke her eyepatch.

“Because I can get close to you all like this, and touch you all.”

“...Yes.”

Seeing that Bel Peol finally answered,

“Yes.”

Hecate also answered clearly as she turned around.

“During the past few days, I brought all of you around meaninglessly. I hope you can understand, but I wanted to feel this raw experience of the world that spreads out ...together with all of you.”

The leader said this, and then lifted his head to look up at the sky.

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"Looks like "this is how it should be"."

The boy's voice ended it, and he looked around.

BAAANNG!

Rofocale started playing the lute again.

"Tears well in my eyes as I look afar, and the flames of my heart danced anew...ahh, that's a completely, world."  
"

The leader who understood behind the meaning of the song again looked back.

A few kilometers away, a palace bridge dropped down , extending out from the hidden world 'Crypt' that surrounded the 'Seireiden'. It looked like a drawbridge that suddenly appeared from the sky, as an inexplicable object moved down from there.

It was a rouge-colored rectangular prism that was as large as a human, floating in the air.

There was something inexplicable on it, a torch, moving at them at a running speed.

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Bel Peol immediately took half a step away from 'him', and faced that object from the front.

“What is it, Fecor?”

“Yes.”

This rectangular prism was the 'Lord' famous throughout for being the guardian of the 'Seireiden'--'Tempest Hoof' Fecor.

To put it precisely, the rectangular prism was the defensive spell 'Magnesia'. In other words, he embalmed himself inside like a coffin.

His appearance was that of a middle-aged man dressed in a shabby suit, and had horns, bat wings, a hooked tail and a large scythe. Basically he looked like a devil, but he didn't have a devil's characteristics of being affected by sunlight.

Right now, the reason why he was hiding himself like this was because of a really awkward reason.

This 'Lord' wasn't just the protector of 'Seireiden', but also made all decisions when Bel Peol wasn't around, so he would interact with the other members through his real identity.

The torch 'Toiba' was raised above his head. Through the use of this 'silver corridor' space that manipulate space, he got use the power of the 'Crypt' to move around 'Seireiden'. This wasn't for heinous surveillance, but to understand the members from their viewpoint.

Because of this, in the place where he could reveal himself, the 'Tempest Hoof' had to show up in such a laughable manner when he wanted to seek the audience of the Trinity.

“What's wrong...? No.”

He appeared as according to the plan. Bel Peol herself should know about this, but why did she ask herself again? She was suspicious about this, but after thinking it through, she should let him present the report, so she let the rectangular prism fall forward. It seemed that he treated this as a prone position.

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“Leader, report. The preparations of the audience ceremony is complete.”

Seeing such an exaggerated attitude and tone, the leader simply answered,

“It's been tough on you, 'Tempest Hoof'.”

The boy's voice then prompted the rest,

“Then, let's go.”

BAANG...

With a sound of the lute, Rofocale jumped down from the rock.

Hecate accompanied 'him' on one side, and Bel Peol was on the other side.

Fecor followed them in the rectangular prism shape, and the crowd slowly moved forward.

To the next development, the battle that belonged to them.

The higher half of the moving fortress was different from the lower half that had lots of secret facilities. Basically, there wasn't many rooms.

Perhaps they existed when they were built, but with the many years of war, this place became modified until it was suitable to war.

And even for such a part of the fortress, there were areas that could be counted as exceptions.

Moving down straight from the palace bridges and through the lobby that's behind the 3 large doors that normally remained unopened was a temple with 5 rows of seats and 2 rows of thick cylindrical pillars on both sides. The pillars were all connected by an arcade, and they' reach ot at the wide ceiling and fused there to form a flat surface. It really looked like a tunnel made of stone.

In the front of the central area with the thick carpet, at the innermost area of the temple, there was a stage that was more than 10 storeys tall. The area in front of the carpet wasn't an altar, but a stage on another stage that was wider.

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Looking up, there was a mural covering the ceiling that had lots of colors on it. It wasn't a religious picture that could be normally spotted, but rather, it was a depiction of a gigantic body and numerous small bodies.

Drawn at the middle was a surrounded huge black snack, and right behind it were 'Denizens' that were running at it.

There wasn't any battle with anyone, no killings between each other, and no devouring of each other, they just continued to run forward with the black snake at center.

“Wait for me, you brat that came from nowhere. Let me teach you how to treat Strategist-dono and the Priestess.”

Right now, the many who understood this painting and the people who were intrigued by it—the members of 'Bal Masque' were all gathered tightly a few steps away from the carpet.

The leader, who vacated his throne for many years, would finally return.

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From now onwards, they would immediately see the inauguration ceremony and hear the decree.

“Do, do we have to do such a thing?”

In fact, many members only heard of the term 'decree' for the first time. The only ones who knew of the actual situation were Bel Peol and some of her trusted Heralds, and only a few experienced Jaegars and Scouts knew of the existence. Most of the members just recognized that it was 'something' that was an absolute secret to the organization.

“Forget about it, Ribesal! That'll be bad!”

As they were informed that this secret would be revealed soon, the excited atmosphere around them was at the maximum. Besides , since it was 'that' leader who would be following through with this plan serious (even thought it was just rumors to most of them), it was undoubtedly a wonderful, or even marvellous plan.

“Why are you so nervous for? We're not showing respect and fear just because that guy's ranked high. Power's the only thing that can decide survival.

Of course, the leader had this mission that lasted for the past few thousands of years, and no matter what, that was too long, so a few people couldn't understand at all. Those people were just growing excited together with the people around them, looking forward to the ceremony that was about to happen.

“But why do you want to do such the thing to leader..”

“And what position? Leader-sama is someone great who shouldn't be measured by something like that, right?”

In such an atmosphere, only three people weren't as excited, but arguing at the wall.

Of course, there was no need to explain further. The three people were Stolas, Pirsoyn and Ribesal.

The former two were struggling hard as they got carried on each hand by Ribesal's gigantic body. On first glance, that was really a rare and interesting scene.

But to them, and especially for the 2 that were carried, this wasn't interesting. Either way, they would be

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undoubtedly suspected for being part of a gang who pulled for a prank.

As for Ribesal, he wasn't really a stupid fellow, and he knew what the consequences would be. But right now, he wanted to see whether the leader would be worth serving serving like how Bel Peol and Hecate, whom he respected, were doing. He wanted to do so using his own power; and he was already overcome by this agitation and impulse that came from his own loyalty.

“Whether he's great or not, just watch.”

He used the 3 horns on his head to point behind the noisy members, at the edge of the temple.

Over there, there was someone muttering something at the wall. A man was looking dejectedly. He had cloth wrapped around his face under the stiff her, and the cape covered his body. It was the assassin, 'Destructive Blade' Sabrac.

“Same there.”

He then pointed at another corner, at the front row of the other side of the center carpet.

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A musician was wearing a triangular hat and dressed in a suit as he skilfully maintained his balance and sat on the tip of the lute. That's the 'Inviter of Satire' Rofocale, who took the initiative and came here to wait at the temple and waited for the leader to show up.

“Bringing that weird guy over, and letting him roam about in the 'Seireiden', that's completely unheard of. Everything happened after that leader came here.”

The obedience would affect the sense of belonging, and the sense of belonging would bring about rejection. His antagonistic heart was against those who entered the organization abruptly.”

But 'Destructive Blade'-sama's help was what we really needed. And as for Rofocale, people of his kind would just be here to watch the show, right? That has nothing to do with the leader!”

“Ya! And how do you know that these people were summoned because of Leader's orders!?”

Seeing Stolas and Pirsoyn look like they wanted to continue and convince him, Ribesal seemed to have crossed his heart,

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“Hmph, since you guys know about my intention, I can't let you all go no matter what. You better struggle here to create the excuse that 'I went crazy'.”

And made such an unreasonable request.

The two who were carried felt a sense of inexplicable danger at this 'Lord' who had been engrossed in his own plan and wouldn't listen to any logic.

(Damn it. If that's the case.)

(Really, that guy.)

Just when the two of them decided to exert force, even if they had to cause a commotion in the ceremony.

At that moment,

Silence...

The large temple immediately became silent as if there was a 'silence' command given.

That's because the gate that only the castle owner's faction could move through was opened.

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In such a silence, both of them started to hesitate if they should take action.

Taking advantage of their hesitation, Ribesal immediately exerted his own power as the pair of arms at his abdomen expand. The beads wrapped around him became numerous little beads as they scattered out.

(Ah!)

(That idiot!)

Gasping, both of them were thrown off.

Right at where he was staring at, the leader walked in, leading Bel Peol, who was holding onto a chain, and Hecate, who was holding onto a staff. Even with the stares of Denizens of all sizes and shapes looking at him intently, 'he' didn't waver at all as he continued to walk casually on that thick carpet, marching forward majestically.

That was a boy with a long black dragontail hair behind his head, and he had scarlet red armor and clothes.

He didn't really look extremely glamorous, but he did give off an abnormally cool vibe.

Even the 'Denizens' who would first gauge the strength of someone found it hard to grasp his strength.

Someone with an unknown origin, that's the first impression he gave him.

It's unknown what kind of ritual was that, as Hecate and Bel Peol stopped halfway thorough.

Only the leader continued to march towards the center of the temple, looking like he wanted to show off his own existence properly.

That 'supposed leader' stopped at a certain spot.

She smiled,

"WHO'S FIRST!!"

And roared at the 'Denizens' gathered in front of him as he reached his arm forward.

The voice went behind the ‘Denizens’, who were shocked by this action. Ribesal couldn’t help but tremble a bit when he realized that his intentions were read. Also, he realized that this was the leader’s invitation to him to come onto the stage.

He wanted to beat him up, to test his own ability, to run, to crash, and fight together.

“The desire to recognize all these.”

The ‘Lord’ had the flames burning inside him as he felt fanatically joyous, and answered back with a growl.

“I’M THE WANDERER ‘DASHING EARTHLY FIEND  
’ RIBESAL!!”

ZOOMM!! His large body took a step forward, and the ‘Denizens’ in his way were all pushed aside.

The members that filled up the temple suddenly cheered fanatically because of a sudden ‘champion’.

Seeing this, Bel Peol remained calm as she expected this to happen, and Hecate continued to staring coldly as she didn’t care at all. Sabrac knew that this would

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happen, but didn't care as he showed a look that had a different intention on it. While Ribesal looked shocked and delighted, everyone else just stood by to watch.

He broke through the screaming and yelling crowd, even though there didn't seem to be any challenger who wanted to stop him as they backed away. The three horned-beetle that was as big and tall as an elephant wasn't a brute who would just charge in like how his appearance would indicate. He was already ready.

“PLEASE DISPLAY YOUR POWER, AND SHOW ME IF YOU'RE WORTHY OF BEING OUR LEADER!”

As the growl echoed throughout the gallery, the beads that landed on the floor expanded as they became bright red flames. The flames started to gather together and shape themselves in copies of him, 7 of them. The real body stepped forward, and the 8 bodies surrounded the leader like 8 mirrors from many different directions.

Seeing the first step that was taken, the leader immediately felt the courage of the challenger.

He floated his body into the air.

Ribesal thought that he wanted to evade the attacks,

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“!”

But immediately found out that he stopped midway after rising to a certain height. After that, once he realized that it was a ‘position to accept the challenge’, he felt extremely excited and joyous, and his body leapt forward.

“

HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA  
!!!!”

He roared as if it was a cheer, and launched his challenge with all his strength gathered in his 3 horns. The next moment, the 7 doppelgangers that had the same power rushed over, surrounding the leader that was in the center and way smaller than he was,

DOOONNNN!!!!

The intense shockwave rocked the air.

The aftershocks at the legs and abdomen gradually scattered.

“—Very good.”

“!?”

What replaced it was the low and sturdy voice of the leader.

“Very good. You managed to improve to such an extent.”

“UWOH, OH!?”

Seeing the main body of the stunned Ribesal, the leader just used his right hand to grab the edge of the horn. He grabbed it tightly from the front, and not horizontally as if he was holding a rod. The boy's body didn't move from that floating position as he showed a powerful and passionate look of joy.

Looking around, the 7 clones were blocked by the dragontailed hair behind his back. The black hairs that blocked the attacks and surrounded the one blocking and the one being block, and all of them just remained there silently.

Ribesal felt incomprehensible fear on seeing the strength the leader immediately showed.

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But even after feeling fearful, he didn't cower or back away in fear. He had already treated them as feelings that cowards who loved their lives and existences would have, and gave up on them thoroughly. Right now, he didn't even care about those things. He realized his own desire, and the opponent who invited him was right in front of him, showing a smile that was intoxicated with burning passion, one that would bewitch others.

(I got to challenge!!)

His mind was only thinking about this. Also,

(I have a lot of battle ability. I want to try out all sorts of skills, use all my endurance! Right now, this existence right in front of me, I want to surpass him!!)

He should got dominated by that fanatical high of not knowing his limits.

However,

"It's great that you took the first move—'Dashing Earthly Fiend' Ribesal."

On hearing the other person's praise in the voice of the boy,

(--h, ha?)

His knee kneeled down naturally. Then, the other knee landed with a thud, and finally, even his four palms were stuck on the ground. The fire that was lit in him because of the invitation; and the heart that was boiling due to the collision of force melted completely after hearing that . He didn't feel any negative feelings like defeat or inferiority in his heart.

What filled his heart was awe and amazement at the maximum.

A desire to accept.

A collision of power.

And an act that showed that they enjoyed it.

The leader in Ribesal's eyes showed himself to have the right to be the leader of them 'Denizens', and felt the

infectious feeling of the burning joy in them. His body trembled as he felt even more excited that when he leapt forward.

(Guuu—that's too bad!!!)

That trembling reached its limit as he immediately laid himself prone the floor.

“HAAAA—!!”

He didn't have any pretense in his attitude, but at the same time, he shouted deep in,

(THIS BATTLE, MY BATTLE WITH THIS  
HONORABLE LORD ENDED!!)

The control that was powered by will was lost due to the change in his mentality, and the 7 doppelgangers all disappeared as they became numerous beads and dropped onto the floor.

The leader's voice spoke,

“Mu, this body's rather good.”

He shook his head slightly, and the dragontailed hair that was like black flowing water immediately reverted back to its original length immediately.

Looking down below the stage, he saw that the members that were gathered in the gallery were laying prone in front of him like Ribesal.

The person who affirmed desire.

He didn't just use brute force; he made them respect him through his way of existence. All the 'Denizens' here who experienced this personally felt excited from deep inside as they agreed to this with silence and attitude.

He was the one who was most qualified to be the leader of 'Bal Masque'.

After a while, the boy's voice said,

"We'll move forward together. This reality's obvious."

He landed on the floor and continued to move forward

.

Amongst everyone present, only 3 people weren't proned down, but kneeling on one leg. Two of them, Bel Peol and Hecate followed him from behind (the last one was naturally Sabrac, who was at the wall), and the three of them finally arrived on the stage.

Swinging his clothes, the leader looked at the crowd and said,

"Alright, stand up, 'Denizens'. We have no time to remain here."

The members in the gallery all stood up together like Ribesal, who was standing on the carpet that was ruffled because of the commotion just now. On seeing that, the leader showed a satisfied look.

"Now that my way of existence as the leader and my strength's revealed, that should be enough. It'll be too much if I explain myself further." Thinking about this, he gave a look at the subordinate beside him, and said in the boy's voice,

"I'll leave it to you."

"Yes."

---

Bel Peol accepted the command and bowed elegantly. This was the first time in a long while that she would give commands to the organization while being commanded by someone else.

“From now on, I’ll announce the decree to everyone in ‘Bal Masque’.”

The members who were completely overwhelmed by the presence of the leader finally remembered the other reason why they attended this ceremony, one that would change their destiny.

The mission of this organization called ‘Bal Masque’ that they serve.

They were in awe of the leader, admiring him with strong emotions, and their expectations continued to increase. Even though nobody said anything explicitly, there was a loud noise of discussion in the gallery.

Suddenly, an unexpected person, an

““OJI-SAMA”!!”

The leader turned around. Bel Peol turned to look opposite Hecate, and overlooking them was an eccentric genius that was hard to handle, the 'Seeking Researcher' Professor Dantalion called out.

All those who knew this knew—especially the man standing at the wall—frowned.

At this moment,

From behind the stage, there was a spot of light that looked like mercury and yet looked dew. It immediately created a vortex without any thickness and spread apart. Soon, that vortex formed a hollow, and gradually formed a path that spread elsewhere, going as high as the maximum height the temple would allow.

Any member would have experienced this phenomenon before. It's the 'Silver Corridor'.

That's a unique tunnel that linked that reassembled the 'Seireiden' and linked all the far places together.

The members all gasped as they looked at the middle of the vortex.

“SORRY~TO KEEP YOU WAITING~ IT’S FINALLY TIME, THIS~MISSION THAT EXCITES ME!! EXCELLENT~! AND~ALSO EXCITING! THIS EXPERIMENT~ WILL START~IMMEDIATELY!!”

The man who was tasked with explaining the technical aspects of the mission said that with an exaggerated high pitch and a draggy voice.

His voice came from within the vortex of the ‘Silver Corridor’, but it’s unknown which area the voice came from.

“THIS~EXPERIMENT~ CAN FINALLY CHANGE US ‘DENIZENS’ STANDINGS~! THUS~ IT WOULD BE CALLED OUR ‘DECREE’! MY RESEARCH~ THAT LASTED SO LONG~IS FINALLY~WORKING~—”

“PROFESSOR, ISN’T EVERYONE WAITING  
HAHHHHHHHHAAAA!!!”

The sound was stopped in an instant, and what replaced it was a faint light that came from the ‘Silver Corridor’.

What he could see what a round object.

---

And slowly, they could see that it was a round stove when looked from the front.

That was the ‘Gehinnom’, a bowl-shaped treasure that was surrounded with black smoke.

The 3 treasure tools that were normally placed over there were gone. The ‘Tataros’ chain that was floating around Bel Peol, the ‘Trigon’ staff Hecate’s carrying, and the ‘Shintetsu Nyoi’ Sydonay carried with him afar; they were all serving and working hard in their own manner.

The ash that filled the bowl started to move slowly.

The ash tray that only illustrated the landscape well through gradients soon became a certain image.

That’s the world map with Japan at center, the country the ‘Seireiden’ was waiting at.

“Then, let me begin the explanation.”

Everyone gathered their concentration to listen to Bel Peol.

Located at a town at a corner of the world.

---

In a night full of foggy rain, an extremely old man was walking on the old pavement that was about to crumble soon.

Shown occasionally under the street lights was a skinny figure in a classic suit. The hat that matched the suit, the cane in his hand, and the presence revealed from the actions all fit this description of an old gentleman. For some reason, he wasn't holding an umbrella.

The abnormally shiny white marble that was stepped on for a long time seemed to be as shiny as a polished mirror as they all reflected the street lights. Due to the weak source of light, it wasn't enough to light the night, but it looked it was lighting up a dark gemstone, or that it lit up a island in the darkness.

Stepping onto such a gem, the old gentleman continued to move from one island to another, and suddenly stopped.

“Oh, long time not see, Decarabia.”

He saw something with a peeping-like gaze. It was a spell in the midst of the foggy rain.

---

Inside the circle that was as large as a human, there was a five-sided star with an eye-shaped seal in the middle, looking like it was half-awake.

“It's not really urgent now. I really didn't think that you would appear here.”

Not minding the other party's unique appearance at all, the old gentleman continued,

“Finally...the mobilization order came to me already?”

The spell didn't answer as it just swayed about, spun about and changed occasionally and randomly in the midst of this rain.

## Chapter 3 - For the Journey

Satou Keisaku was squeezed inside the train.

(I knew I should have come out earlier today.)

He only regretted it now.

It was a bit better than the morning or evening peak periods, but Misaki City station was a interchange with lots of routes passing through. It's rather common to see the station crowded at around 2 to 3, causing a human jam. Most notably, the line that was linked from Misaki City station to the southwest direction and the one that was linked to the capital far away were even packed.

He continued to be pushed around by the crowd, and the overly-large baggage that was hanging on his shoulders was often pulled around.

(Oww...but then, it can't be helped.)

Satou wanted to say goodbye formally to the 'Chanter of Elegies' Margery Daw before he left, and waited for her to wake up, since she was so thoroughly drunk last night, but ended up dilly-dallying until this time, and that's how it ended up.

---

Seeing that she was like usual, Satou felt somewhat depressed, but immediately thought that he shouldn't be depressed over something trivial like this, and thus motivated himself as he declared energetically at the door,

“Alright then, I’m going off!”

He declared that to her with all his determination.

And Margery’s reply to this statement,

“Okay okay. You’re going to be an errand boy down there. Listen to what they tell you to do.”

Was really lifeless,

And as for ‘Fangs of Devastation’ Marchosias,

“Have a nice trip. It doesn’t really matter how long it’ll take, so it’ll be all up to you now, Satou Keisaku.”

He said that with a rare serious voice,

(Well, couldn’t they have said that with more feeling—  
)

---

The dejected boy thought,

(--Ah, damn it.)

He immediately realized what he wanted from her. He hurriedly shook his head, and the passengers around him who were packed together glared at him angrily, but he ignored them completely.

(How can I be so weak once I came out!)

He made the vow 'to do whatever he could do for her' as he made this request. It would be too selfish of him to expect a reward, or even stubborn.

(Right, no matter the tone used, 'Listen to what they tell you to do', this instruction from Margery-san is correct...I need to do my work properly.)

As a beginner communication officer that was commissioned by Outlaw, he had to quickly process matters, complete report receiving and transfer duties... the identity, movement and objectives would all fall on him. Right now, he's not allowed to fawn around like a child or look down on others like a fool. Of course, it's because he knew that that he was motivating himself.

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(Alright, let's do this!)

Feeling motivated deep inside, he pressed his chest with his hand to make sure that the introductory letter and the tag Margery gave him were there.

Margery said before that the tag this time would be a little different from before.

“The Outlaws’ responsibility is that they are not allowed to meet a ‘Denizen’ without us Flame Haze around. It’s for this moment that I prepared something for you.”

“Adding all sorts of functions just because you’re worried, hihihihiii!!”

According to both of them, this was said to be a detector of ‘Denizens’. If there was any similar presence nearby, they would send the status to the contact through some form of touch.

“And once this thing senses a ‘Denizen’, you need to run away with all you got, no matter the means. Don’t approach them, or even think of investigating—”

“We don’t need to say much more, but if you even think of wanting to fight them—”

“I won’t forgive you, that’s for certain.”

Though he didn’t like this command, he did make this mistake before, so he could only accept this silently.)

(It’s true that if it wasn’t be Margery-san...)

His last mistake was to put the broadsword treasure tool to fight the ‘Denizen’—and recalling it, it was stupid, reckless and an overestimation of his abilities—He used to experience the difference in ability because, and even in the packed train, he couldn’t help but tremble.

(Even now, if it wasn’t for the Flame Hazes, someone like me would...)

Satou couldn’t help but swallow his saliva.

Right now, he was leaving the fortress or cradle called Misaki City that the Flame Hazes were protecting, and entering a world where human-devouring beasts rampaged throughout the land. This would feel even scarier than moving around alone in a thick forest. There

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was no means to run away; no matter what weapon he took, no matter how many people he had with him, it was all meaningless. This...was a completely terrifying world.

In this world of terror, even if it was just for a moment, someone would be devoured and killed somewhere, without anyone...or even him realizing him, lost from the world, and forgotten thoroughly by people. No matter how intense their feelings were, or how they felt about him, there was no exceptions.

(Is this...is this 'the truth to this world'...)

Unknowingly, he found his shield, the Flame Haze Margery Daw. Up till now, the boy subconsciously gained comfort by leaving everything to her. It was only until then that he finally realized the real meaning behind the words that were said so often he was familiar with.

(Over here, everyone, "humans" were actually living in such a defenseless world.)

The supernatural people who knew 'the truth to this world', the Flame Hazes, with Margery leading them, seemed to show an apathetic attitude, but they weren't as cold as how they seemed to be.

Even if they wanted to save everyone, the world was too big.

Even if they wanted to eliminate all the 'Denizens', the numbers were too great.

They had to accept this fact and fight on. They had to show this through their determination. Their attitude of not giving up after feeling unhappy was like refusing something they couldn't understand, like a child throwing tantrums.

(Flame Haze.)

Satou again wondered about the term used to call these supernatural fighters.

(Amazing...they're really amazing.)

Then, he shuddered and asked himself if he could really assist them.

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All the members of Outlaw probably had the same fear when they work. During this time, Outlaw was attacked on a large scale by an unknown enemy, and many members were killed. Again, it's said that it wasn't rare as well.

"Even so, can I continue to assist them in their will?"  
He asked himself as he shuddered.

(Wait.)

"When was it that I ran for my dear life after being attacked by a 'Rinne', a servant of a 'Denizen' at the station?"

"When was it that I was involved in a bloody and fiery tragedy at the Cool Autumn festival?"

"When was it that I witnessed the destructive power of a 'Lord' that destroyed an either city?"

"Even when they attack me while I'm undefended, am I really to take them all on?"

(Ahh, of course I do.)

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He didn't overcome his fear, and he definitely couldn't mature so smoothly. The boy realized this himself. However, he did feel fearful and unable to take action many times before when he was one of the victims.

(And this isn't because I had such a problem...but that I have to do this for Margery-san.)

In response to the honest words that came from his heart.

(...?)

Just when he was about to answer, and when it seemed to be a test to him,

(--...)

A certain feeling occurred at this moment.

“—Eh!?”

“—e, eh!?”

Satou continued help but let out a sound, and the nearby passengers gave him a baffled look.

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(Yo, you're kidding, right!?)

The tag that he was holding tightly at his chest sent a signal to his brain, indicating that 'that thing's coming. If he was certain of this, there was no need for explanations. It felt like he had a new organ that sensed differently from his ears and eyes, and he felt a certain existence coming over at him.

(Is, is that really the 'Denizen'!? But why!? Am I discovered here!?\_

He was about to think about what was going on, but immediately realized that it was pointless. He hurriedly looked around. Though it wasn't peak hours, the place was so crowded that he couldn't even see his feet. He couldn't even move his body, let alone push others and run away.

(What should I do.)

And even if they wanted to run away, how's the train driver going to do so?

"Oh yeah, there's some mechanism that can let the train stop, right? But which one is it? No, wait, that should be on the platform, right? Isn't there one on the

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train? Wait, I can ask others for help, right? But who would believe me if I say it out loud? Would anyone help me to do such a ridiculous thing?"

(What should I do!?)

He got even more anxious, but he just couldn't take action. The 'thing' he felt was obviously coming at him. Realizing this, he felt fear coming out from his emotions.

There wasn't any 'Chanter of Elegies' Margery Daw around.

Though it was an obvious fact, what became a cruel fact now was moving at the boy who was travelling. Should he use the tag to contact her? But it's too late, the enemy's moving too quickly.

(No, isn't it like this!? It's not supposed to be like this, right!?)

Terrified, Satou still thought this way. He didn't realize something, and neither did he regain his calm, and neither was he planning to rise to a higher existence. He just wanted to complete his responsibility even when he was terrified.

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(If that's the case, I can only do this!)

"Now's the time to take action! Isn't it something I swore I'll do?"

"Since it became like this, I have to serve Margery-san until the end."

"Once I notify her that the 'Denizens' are coming, I can make preparations beforehand."

"That's the minimum resistance I can do now."

(Until the end, I'll do what I can do!)

But his determination was too late.

He hesitated for far too long.

(Damn it, that's—)

At that moment, that 'thing' closed in quickly.

(Can't I make it—)

His judgment couldn't catch up. "That person should be able to do this well. I can't do things as well as how I

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say it, I can't help out at all, damn it! I'm just going to die meaninglessly like this"...at the final moment, he could only harbor all sorts of remorse and regret.

(--Margery-san!!) He cried out from deep inside his heart.

At this moment,

BOOM,

He could only hear such a sound.

"!!"

Seeing the boy jump up suddenly, the neighboring passengers felt that he was very suspicious.

As for him, he had no time to care about others or even hide his emotions. Feeling extremely tense and fearful, his mind went blank for quite a while, before he realized the meaning behind this sound.

During the 10 seconds, something blocked the window scenery and went past his sights.

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(What, what was that?)

At the same time, the tag felt the presence of the 'Denizen' going further away.

(Don't tell me.)

It went off in a straight line, just like how it approached here.

(The, train...?)

The presence wasn't aimed at him.

It was on the train that was going the other side.

"...!"

Realizing and understanding this, Satou nearly tumbled over. If it wasn't for the crowd in the station supporting him, he would have collapsed already. But in another sense, his mind went blank.

(I'm saved, am I?)

He had to fact 'the truth to this world' immediately after the start of the journey, and the body that managed

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to survive trembled due to pure joy. As for the owner of the body, he was so tense that he felt extremely relieved that he managed to get past the doors of death, and he didn't even realize that this was a delighted feeling.

As he finally managed to calm down and rationalize,

(So I wasn't discovered?)

Thinking about this, he relaxed,

(But then again...why would a 'Denizen' take a train?)

At this moment, he finally wondered.

But this was just his biasedness. In fact, no matter whether they're Flame Hazes or 'Denizens', they could all use human transportation (and most of the time, they'll pay for the tickets), but right now, he definitely wouldn't know.

Swaying about in the train,

(What kind of joke is that, really...my lifespan nearly shortened there.)

After a few seconds, he finally realized something important and obvious.

(Hm? Went past the train—)

He went off from Misaki City.

He took the train from Misaki City station.

If that's the case, there was only one station.

“—AH!?”

This time, Satou cried.

“DAMN IT! WHY AT THIS TIME!”

While panicking, he frantically struggled and tried to get the tag out of his pocket. During this time—

(But even if I want to go back, I'm taking the express train...da, damn it!!)

He recalled the warning Margery and Marchosias told him, and pondered about his next course of action.

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(Erm, would this be considered 'run away' like what they said?)

He looked outside the window at the scenery that was passing by.

(Right, if I want to contact her, I should maintain some distance, right? If they know that I'm using a spell, that 'Denizen' may come back.)

This about this, he suddenly realized,

(Ahh, am I an idiot?)

He took out the handphone from his other pocket.

A communication officer must assist humans and supernaturals. Satou started to realize the meaning behind these facts, but he was already having a hard time dealing with the crisis that's approach.

(Erm, if I call back home, will the grannies pick up the phone?)

"I should get the grannies to get Margery-san to pick the phone up." Thinking about this,

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“...”

After a few seconds of silence, he suddenly thought of something and dialed a number that wasn't his house. He put his phone to his ear and waited for him to pick up the phone, feeling extremely anxious about that longing dialing tone.

(Really...what are you doing, HURRY UP AND PICK THE PHONE UP!!!)

Feeling nervous and fearful to the max, the options of 'hurry up and run away' and 'I don't want to do this' is not in his thoughts, and he still hadn't realize it.

Spending his time meaningless at home, Eita Tanaka had a bad feeling when Satou, who wanted to act cool, quickly called back.

(What now? Really.)

“Would he hang the phone up?” Hesitating meaninglessly for a while, he still pressed the button to answer the call from his friend, heard the explanation, the emergency mission about the 'Denizens' attack at him, and after being fed the emergency mission,

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“WHA, WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO!!?”

He roared back at that request as a reply.

However, Satou didn't care about his friend throwing a tantrum

(No matter what, please! You should know that it's better to watch over the 'Haridan', right!? Also, don't use that tag, the enemy may sense it!)

“OI OI!! WAIT—”

The phone was hung up.

If he called back, he would either get a rejected call or that the phone was off, since that guy always loved to do such things. Tanaka guessed (correctly), and couldn't help but grit his teeth.

Another 'Denizen'.

It's been only two weeks since they came, when they took his good friend.

(THAT'S WHY I SAID I HAD ENOUGH!!)

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It would be easy if he could say such words.

But in reality, the ‘Denizens’ were closing in on this city. If he ignored it, it would become an emergency, and he would not know how much damage it would bring to this city. More importantly, the one who should be fearful about this was Tanaka himself, and he knew that. Also, the worst thing was that Satou should have understood that too.

(Even now, the train’s closing in.)

In the end, like two weeks before, Tanaka stood up. He ran and dialed Satou’s house number. No matter what, he had to ask Margery for instructions.

(I’ll make you pay when you get back, Satou...)

Cursing reluctantly, Tanaka felt it through this fear.

He did not hesitate to take action this time, unlike two week ago.

Was it because he experienced the shame of hesitation?

Or was it because he was all energetically because of the jealousy he harbored on Satou.

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He couldn't tell, but either way, he had to take action. He had to be quick, and no matter how painful it was, he could only move...there was no other way.

His legs were trembling, and his heart was curling back in fear.

But even so, he could only do this.

Though he got faster, he was anxious.

At first, he started running like two weeks ago, but since Satou, who he could entrust this to, wasn't around, he had nowhere to run to. Also, he was the one Satou asked, and this is what it meant to be backed down into the corner. He held his handphone and slowly increased the strength of his grip.

“AHH, DAMN IT, WHAT'S WRONG ALREADY!! GRANNY, AT LEAST PICK UP THE PHONE TODAY!!”

It was unknown whether Tanaka was shouting at the phone or himself as he cried and shouted.

It's been a while since he took a train here. Did he take it

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during the summer? No, that's not true. It wasn't that nobody objected to him taking human transport, but he insisted on it.

To make sure that he knew what he would be doing, he decided to investigate everything from 'this visual point' first. It's been a long time since he was dressed like this, thick shirts and pants, with a black scarf, and he hadn't been with the crowd for a long time. It didn't have anything to do with the motive, but he felt extremely relaxed.

He was stuck in the middle of this packed train, and to be honest...perhaps it was because his high school was near his house that he never experienced this before. Recently, he would just take feeder buses to get to different places. Even though he didn't feel tired, it must have been really unbearable as a human.

Suddenly,

(...?)

He detected a weak spell presence, and most likely, nobody other than him would be able to detect it. This

was a familiar feeling, and that was most likely a response to the presence. He could feel the reaction of that spell closing in at a rapid speed.

(It's not like that, right?)

The presence was coming in on the same time, and it seemed that the equal speeds were closing in. If that was the case, both parties should be on the trains. As he made this judgment, their distance continued to close in.

(So, what should I do?\_

He didn't know who that was, but that wasn't a Flame Haze, and neither was it a 'Denizen'. If that's the case, it was most likely someone related to Outlaw, called communication officer or something. He came here boldly, thinking that 'there was no need to hide my presence, since he can use that as a restraining power', but that decision seemed to have the opposite effect, as he didn't expect to meet those people before he reached his destination.

(Things really can't go as I wished.)

Before he reached the destination, they probably wouldn't take action before they understood his

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intentions, let alone stop him—that was what he thought. However, it's better to have sufficient time. If someone notified the rest and caused a commotion, they would increase their alertness, and it would be troublesome.

(Should I take care of it?)

He just needed to deploy a Fuzetsu right when the trains passed by, and eliminate anyone who could move inside.

(Wait.)

That won't do...no, better not to this.

(I have only one aim. There's no need to worry about such trivial stuff.)

No matter what, once they saw him, the Flame Hazes would naturally take a gradual approach. Once they knew that he dealt with the communication officer, that would mean giving up on gaining time, causing a situation when they would fight once they met, and it would be a complete reversal of priorities.

(Yes, and also...)

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*Since they know that I have foresight, they would understand that I let this communication officer go. That communication officer and the emergency report would present me in a way that I have no intention on harming them. So, better leave it like that.*

(Um, that's what he said.)

In his heart, someone spoke to him, and the train outside the window passed by his eyes.

Having lost the 10 seconds of chance to kill the enemy, he felt inexplicably relaxed.

(Really.)

Sighing as he looked ahead,

“!”

Something that he felt like he never seen in quite a while was at the short residential estate far away.

It was the thing that was located at the bridge over the Mana River that's located at Misaki City Center, the A-shaped main tower of Misaki Bridge.

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The main tower that was arranged together on both sides were waiting for his return. Looking down, he could see that familiar western residential area of the city , a gradual landscape in front of him.

(I'm...back.)

Thankful as he thought this, he silently muttered,

(For the journey.)

He's headed towards this land that had the people who he lived with, his mother, friends, and also...them,

(I...came back.)

He called out from deep within.

The scenery in front of him became a riverside as it went past the Mana river.

As a visitor and also someone returning back, he continued to move down from the southwest area of the city, into the north where the residential estate was, past the Mana river, and until the Misaki City Station.

The audio broadcast that sounded familiar, and yet not , rang in his ears.

(This train will be arriving at Misaki City~ Misaki City ~)

Having received this emergency report, everyone was gathered at Satou's house garden for a last minute meeting,

“Yoshida Kazumi, what do you intend to do?”

Being asked this by Alastor, Yoshida Kazumi didn't know how to respond.

(I, I...)

Thinking about this, even though 'he' was involved or went into the battle head-first, this would be the first time that it would be a battle that didn't involve 'him'.

“You can head to the old Yoda Shopping Center's ' Haridan' to observe with Tanaka Eita-shi, or you can leave this place as far as you can. There's only these two options de arimasu.”

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“We recommend the later.”

Wilhelmina and Tiamat said in a matter-of-fact tone.

“Hm, Missy, you may be involved, but you don't have a reason to work hard. We won't think anything about it, so just try and escape.”

Marchosias quipped.

Tanaka looked at Yoshida with an obviously pale face, and said,

“That's the best course of action, Yoshida-san. We don't know who's coming, so you don't have any reason to stay here at all.”

He continued to insist on fulfilling his duty, even when his legs were trembling.

*Should I just let him send Yoshida far away?* Thinking about this, Margery gave a wry smile, and merely prompted the girl with a choice.

“Though everyone said that, you don't really have to force yourself, right? To be honest, even if you're here, I don't really think you can be of much help here, and that 'thing' can't possibly be used in this situation.

Margery pointed at the thing that couldn't be seen as it was blocked by the indoor casual clothes.

It was the Greek-cross necklace that's hanging on Yoshida's neck.

Like what Margery said, the only 'Crimson Realm' treasure tool 'Giralda' that she could use wasn't something that could be used immediately. No matter what, only she knew of the conditions to activate it, and the only consequences it brings would be meaningful only when a certain boy was around. Since 'he' disappeared, this thing just became a simple decoration.

“I...”

Seemingly trying to force the answer out, Yoshida placed her hand on her chest. Then, she turned to look at the girl who said nothing, the girl who brought her here.

The gaze that looked back at her looked like it was testing her, and yet it looked like it was gently consoling her.

“...I want to stay here.”

Yoshida said adamantly.

“If Tanaka-kun had something he would be worried about, I'll help out no matter how trivial it is. And, since the enemy chose to come here at this time, I don't think 'it had no relation'.”

Everyone, especially the Flame Hazes, were impressed by her. It's true that in this situation, there would be a very low possibility that a 'Denizen' who wasn't involved in this incident would come here.

Even though she looked scared, and that her heart was wavering, she would think through what she had to think through, and would work hard for what she had to work hard for. The girl was completely mentally prepared.

“If I have the choice to run away now...I'll just feel that I'll fall from where I was. I...I won't accept this.”

---

Declaring this, Yoshida held tightly onto the 'Giralda' in front of the chest.

(—"Even so, I'll still choose the path I think is right"—)

He walked on the platform of Misaki City Station.

Away from the noisy crowds, and down the long and narrow platform.

(It became a lot prettier now.)

The train station that was once destroyed and now rebuilt was glittering in all directions.

As for the old train station, they tried to beat back the assistant Domino, who attempted to activate a reverse tuning, and it was completely destroyed together with the surroundings by the monster train that had the 'Seeking Researcher' Professor Dantalion on it as it crashed in.

They did not see the devastation themselves, but they did see the 'rubble'. Also, he understood then what would happen if 'Denizens' and Flame Haze fought outside a Fuzetsu.

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(That incident didn't cause a single casualty at all. If I have to describe it, it's a miracle."

Thinking about it, he looked behind the wall that was a few months old, at the east side of the train station building.

The area where he and the other Misaki City residents called 'the other side of the station' was the commercial street, and there were a lot of new and old office buildings that looked really plain and boring.

At a corner, there was a tall and new building that was covered in glass.

That's the Misaki Atrium arch building.

That was a complicated building that used an open-ceiling concept inside, which complimented the four corridors that form an art gallery with a food street in the high levels, the hotel in the middle levels, and the offices in the lower levels.

(I think this was where I had my first date with Yoshida-san.)

They went through that gallery...what was that called? As what happened after that was too traumatizing, he couldn't remember much from it. Besides, he just barely managed to survive that initial battle, and just when he was wandering around without a goal in his daily life, he met a 'Denizen' again.

There was a man, the 'Corpse Retriver' Lamies.

(Not, it's the 'Spiral Organ' Leanen-Sidhe.)

The Flame Haze 'Chanter of Elegies' Margery Daw, who was infamous for being a berserker on the battlefield, came chasing after that 'Denizen' who came here collecting Torches.

(She was really scary at first.)

Of course, he didn't that then that Satou and Tanaka were involved and viewed her as an older sister. When she was about to battle, she would assume a terrifying persona where she would vent her rage and anger on the enemy in a way completely different from 'here' who would live for her mission. But after hearing the explanation, she understood and became a typical Flame Haze.

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(To be honest, it's really amazing that two people she was unfamiliar with was able to calm her down.)

He couldn't help but smile wryly.

Unknowingly, he left the platform that was full of people waiting to take the next train, and walked down the stairs. He went through the brand new automatic gantry, and found the communication street that was newly built behind the train station building.

If he moved north from here, he would see the shopping street that as opened in conjunction with the newly-built station.

(It's been a few months of training and fighting, I've really become a little more capable.)

During the last battle in this city, on the night of Christmas Eve, he used himself as bait and attempted to lure the people of 'Bal Masque' who wanted to kill the Flame hazes, the Wanderer 'Assembly and Division' Zarovee and—

(The other Wanderer...)

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After pondering for a while, he recalled Bel Peol's explanation.

(It seemed that he was called 'Howling Fang' Biforns.)

And also, the main character who appeared at that moment, the assassin, 'Destructive Blade' Sabrac.

Though battles have to involve hardship, there were few like him who were able to do such devastation like how he did and used such tough measures to deal with them. As they were prepared beforehand, had good chemistry, were able to react to changes, continued to pursue him and not run away, they barely managed to force him to retreat. It was really a tough battle.

But more than that, there was another strong emotion inside him.

(Sorry.)

It's about the two girls who were waiting for him at the exit of the shopping center.

(I'm really sorry.)

Did the letters he asked his messenger to deliver reached them safely? That was a message he had to tell them, one that told them that 'he was here', even when he had to leave, had to disappear, and yet still leave behind.

Bel Peol said confidently that arrangements were made, and that it would be delivered on the second day. As if would be sent to the unsuspecting humans, there wouldn't be any traces...

(But she wouldn't say any unnecessary lies.)

Muttering to himself, he walked out from the train station.

(And it doesn't matter now anyway.)

He walked straight out from the train station and onto the main road, and looked at his hometown that was right in front of him—Misaki City.

(Besides, I came here like this.)

Thinking about this, he continued to move forward.

Into the crowd, and passing by many people.

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At the station plaza that was rebuilt together with the train station, he could see a little clock tower. Opposite here, there was a bus interchange that had many functions, and there were a lot of people moving through as well.

On the buses that were going into the station, that eye-catching red bus directory plate had the name of a place on it.

Popular Fantasy Park.

That was the place he went with Yoshida on a date.

(That's really memorable...when was it that I went with Yoshida-san?)

At that time, he was on bad terms with the 'Manipulator of Objects' Wilhelmina Carmel, who wanted to kill him, and just so happened to get help from his father who came back from overseas. "The costume was really hot inside, get me something easier next time." He chuckled.

(Yes, it was summer.)

He remembered that, under the shade of the trees on the other side of the hill, he was treated to a delicious fried pork sandwich. At that time, he couldn't decide things for himself, and continued to rely on the kindness of the girl who liked him.

(I was really shameless then.)

While feeling reluctant, he remembered the cruel happiness that he wasn't aware of then.

The fear of going into battle, the hesitation over leaving his hometown, the warmth of happiness and sadness a human could embrace, the reluctance to leave the normal daily life...ironically, the reason why he treasured all these times was because he couldn't decide over leaving or staying, and viewed them as by-products of the trouble.

The girl continued to use that method to make him stay on the human side, and taught him all these meaningful things. She lived together with him in this city, and became a symbol of his everyday life—Yoshida Kazumi. It's because of that that he could show respect to her and say: Fear and hesitation, warmth and reluctance, being lost and being troubled, being a 'Mystic' and living

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together with everyone; I was really happy about all those things.

(Those days,)

He walked to the zebra crossing, saw the traffic light that was about to change signals, and walked to the entrance of that street that's not too far away.

(They began here.)

The bustling road that had restaurants and eateries littered all over the place was as crowded as ever.

The day when the fiery red sunset dyed his vision red, when he was stuck in a Fuzetsu that day.

The day when his daily life was burnt to a crisp, no, lit up, and transformed him.

The ones who used the Fuzetsu that evening were two 'Rinnes' who attacked him.

The one who rescued him from that crisis was the girl called 'Flame-Haired Burning-Eyed Hunter'.

She had no name other than the title of the contractor to the 'Flame of Heavens' Alastor. To distinguish her from the rest, he could only name this Flame Haze, the girl, based from her 'Nietono no Shana'.

(She really treated me as a thing back then.)

He couldn't understand why he died early, and also why his dead remains were used to make a fake (even now, he was wondering whether it was justified). He continued to hold onto this anger, and this girl ended up feeling anxious and annoyed. He didn't know what the future was in store for him, and he couldn't be bothered to care for existences other than himself.

(thought I really pretended back then, that was really a fated encounter.)

As for him, that was an undeniable fact.

(I need some time before I could see that scenery again .)

He thought as he looked up above the road.

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The sky today was as clear as ever, and there were very few clouds.

It seems that he could see the beautiful sunset.

He did not enter the bustling street, but went with the human flow, down the road and west. As he walked on, he recalled that this used to be a pedestrian street for a while after the station was destroyed.

(It seemed that everyone was sitting on the railings and drinking juice or something back then.)

At that time, the entire road was packed full of people. All sorts of things could be seen with each other, from the opened-aired restaurants to the opened-aired businesses and street buskers, and now, it could still bring forth an inexplicable amazement.

The little places where he would go with his friends to as if it was a festival were now replaced with vehicle traffic, and now, it only existed in human memories.

He recalled another memory, probably to remove that loneliness.

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(I think I came here during the Cool Autumn Festival.)

They chose a few 'class representatives' from each of the first year classes, made them wear costumes and parade around the station. The 7 people, including him, were dressed in different costumes, and they had to raise advert billboards from their sponsors.

Then, while feeling excited, busy and boggled over the overnight preparations of the school festival, there was the danger 'Colorful Wave' Pheles brought along when she attacked, and due to the sudden terrifying attacks that came at the closing ceremony, the thoughts naturally returned to him.

Also, during the worst moments when they had a vague understanding of his real identity, the time when his anxiety was so big it went past what he could take—

(Really, what was my body...)

The one who set the mechanism, the one who the mechanism was intended for, the person who was involved; this thing combined all these factors together, but it was like a mysterious black box, not explained at all, this treasure tool called the 'Reiji Maigo'.

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Thinking about it, it was because someone was interested in such an inexplicable thing that they were able to create this intimate relationship.

(Speaking of which,)

He recalled the words that were said before,

(—"Whether it's Satou Keisaku, Tanaka Eita or Yoshida Kazumi, even if they knew that you weren't human, they can't do anything about it." —"No matter what the truth is, as long as it's a place they aren't suited to in any way, they will continue to laze around in their everyday life."—"Like what you felt today, it's the same normal day, the same scenery, and the same friends. And this chill and isolation would continue to wear these things off bit by bit."—)

He did not know when he argued back.

(—"But everyone knew of it, and still recognized me, even when this everyday life came to an end"—"I guess it would be something different from this chill."—)

And then, before he even checked which explanation was correct, he ran away.

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If they knew that he became like this, it's unlikely that it would be merely chills or isolation. Would that be a response of anger, sadness, or rejection?

He never intended to find out though as he turned from the main road and went north.

Slightly far away from the noisy road, this place was a recreational place that was surrounded by the fence, which covered everywhere except outside the road, and the houses that formed the opening. This was the area where the landowners of Misaki City stayed in, commonly called the 'Old Residential Area', and if he walked in a little further, he should be able to see Satou Keisaku's house.

(That Satou should have transferred schools already.)

That spacious house of him that had everything was often the gathering spot because Margery was staying there, whether it was for daily events or not. And because of his nonchalant attitude as the owner of the house, people felt comfortable with the house, and it practically became everyone's place.

(How's that Tanaka doing?)

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He remembered the good friend who got involved in that, but dropped off halfway. He should be living around here too, but he never went to his house before. It's pointless for him to go there now, and to him, it'll only cause trouble for himself. Anyway, he should just leave things as they were. Thinking about this, he didn't look for him, but turned right and walked out of the old residential area.

(Also, it's better not to agitate Margery-san too much.)

Thinking about this, he immediately felt that he was lying to himself as he chuckled.

(It's impossible for me not to be discovered. I never hid my presence anyway.)

After walking for a while, he reached the river bank of the Mana River.

He did not look for the steps, but used a few light steps to walk down the slope of green grass.

(It's great if it rained just now...ah, but it needs to be a morning sky where there's no sun.)

Looking at the riverbank, he saw the blue sky that looked twice as big, and a thought touched his heart.

(Did I...end up knowing a lot more things?)

Though both sides were riverbanks, but since he was at a different time and place, the scenery would be different. The many past sceneries he saw before were the same, and he only realized it after becoming like 'this'. He scenery became a mirror reflecting the world, and as time passed, things changed and moved, even after knowing more sceneries, the unknown would never decrease, and there wouldn't be an end to them.

(The scenery that time was just limited to that one scenery, that's all.)

Even this normal and ordinary white scenery today would be one of them, he thought as he walked on.

Sometimes, he would be here training in the morning; sometimes, he would walk over here with some of his friends, or sometimes, he would move through here during the Misago Festival...he recalled every single scene, and kept them within this scene.

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(Do I recognize this scene...at that time, if it wasn't for Yoshida-san seeing 'this side', Yoshida-san's scenery should be more peaceful and quiet, right?)

However, the one who chose to look at this path wasn't anyone else, but Yoshida Kazumi herself.

When the Misago Festival started, she was asked an old Flame Haze who acted as a tuner, the monster 'Mobilizer of Ceremonial Equipment' Khamsin who didn't understand any situation at all, to help her with the 'tuning' of the distortion that was growing rapidly in Misaki City. During that same time, she borrowed a treasure tool.

The monocle 'Stolas'—the thing that was able to see 'the truth to this world'. During the Misago Festival, she crushed the only path of retreat into her daily life completely.

She knew that the boy she liked became a Torch.

(But even so, she—)

Even after knowing this—

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(—"Right now, I know that this Sakai-kun in front of me is human."—"Such a warm body, and a warm heart"—"I like this Sakai-kun the most"—)

That was what she said to him.

(Right now, what sort of person is the one standing here?)

Even after becoming like 'this', he still continued to rely on her thoughts to answer these questions that even he had to spend a lot of time thinking about this.

He was really impressed that she was able to barge into such a cruel place and yet have the strength to make such an answer.

Walking forward, he could see the Daitetsu Bridge.

(Yoshida-san wasn't the only one who acknowledged me. Dad too.)

He could say this without exaggeration that his dad was the one person he admired most in this world. He remembered the words he said to his dad when he crossed on this bridge. His human body was already

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dead in reality, but after knowing that his own mother, Chigusa, was pregnant with a new life, his dad said—

(—“Because you're a man who looked like you're matured enough for me to talk to you like this”—)

He met his dad a few months before then, and his dad met his son twice without knowing that the son because a residue.

Taking the difference between these twice, his father who would never praise others easily said so, and this means,

(My growth was definitely proof of my existence.)

That wasn't something he got from his simple and boring life. The maturity his father mentioned was the experience gained after going through all sorts of crisis and troubles, a proof that he still had strength.

(However, it's a pity that I can't use this power to help my mother.)

It's because of this new life, a little brother or sister that could replace him, that made him decide to leave as he was just a residue. Even so, he felt extremely

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heavy-hearted for being unable to provide help for his mother, who would have a hard time in the future. The word ‘unfilial’ bore down heavily on him.)

(Sorry, mom...but I changed.)

He walked past the bridge, onto the riverbank, and saw a lump of green protruding far away at the street over there, the Misaki Hill. It was where he saw the night scenery of fireworks with everyone, and the Misaki Shrine, where he brought some bento here with a girl, could be seen vaguely on the slope of the hill.

“He could become stronger through training.” The first time he knew of it was when he went home that day.

(—“You have surpassed a human” —)

He was told this, accepted that he wasn’t a human anymore, and became a non-human existence. He should be fearful about those two aspects, but that feeling started to disappear somehow.

That was because he imagined it many times as part of his aim to mature, but he would give up at the end because he was just too weak, or that there was a new beginning. While he had to make the painful decision to

break from his everyday lie, he started to glow radiantly with a clear direction.

He would go on a journey with the Flame Haze gaze and go in this state.

(I really didn't expect this to happen.)

He walked down the riverbank and moved towards the west residential area of Misaki City West, before arriving at a large park.

(More important, it's because I missed those moments that I came here.)

What he felt when he returned here wasn't just fear.

The other feeling that became the key to overcoming this pain was the mesmerizing feeling.

That was a feeling he had with the Flame Haze 'Flame-Haired Burning-Eyed Hunter', the girl who had affections for him. He always worked hard to become the comrade the girl could rely on. At that time, while he tried his best not to treat the girl as 'that kind of partner', that was the moment where he realized it.

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He could fall for her.

(To think it actually took me months to realize this obvious thing.)

He started to find his own stupidity amusing.

(The parts where I felt that I 'liked' her were accumulated during our everyday life.)

He stepped into the park and arrived under the shade of the tree branches that were left bare due to the winter. That moment on the bench in front of the fountain should be one of those moments too. Over here, he saw he eating the melon bread happily, and felt a certain feeling.

(And also...over here, there's a lot of memories that couldn't be compared to other places.)

He went past the park and arrived at the road, and he could see it standing there.

Misaki City Municipal High School.

The old, cramped and normal school building.

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(Ahh.)

There was no way he could describe that scene using words.

It's just that a complicated feeling swelled up inside him.

He felt somewhat tempted as he walked down to the cross junction that took a long time to change signals. He tried to look at this place that changed half of his existence, but he did not enter, instead moving around the walls. The more he began to recall what he did here, the more the thoughts continued to come.

(No matter whether it was spring, summer, autumn, winter, I spent my life here...normally, I should be here for another 2 years and a bit.)

The days he spent here remained fresh in his mind, and it felt good. Those days that he couldn't go back to nor wait for it to arrive appeared in his mind and disappeared.

He moved down the west side of the wall, and could find the east side of the shopping street.

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(...)

He turned to look at the other side of the shopping street that was bustling with customers making a ruckus, and focused on the scene that could be seen even after 10 blocks down the roof. Unlike just now, this was a sad and bitter look that was completely different from just now. What he saw was the location of the houses of a girl he was familiar with, and a boy he was familiar with.

Yoshida Kazumi's house, where he went only once during a birthday party.

Ike Hayato's house, which he went to play at many times when he was young.

How would the girl, who had feelings for him, think after seeing him like this now?

(Perhaps...she'll miss me.)

How's the good friend of his, who forgot him without knowing what happened, doing right now?

(It's meaningless to think of it now.)

Right now, he couldn't look for her.

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(If I found her on the way there—)

Just when he was thinking about that, he saw a group of people running around the school as they're doing their training.

"!"

And one of them was a girl he knew.

She looked 'cool' rather than 'cute', and had a slender body. She's radiant when she smiled, and straightforward when angry; interesting when embarrassed, and direct when taking action. Just like her name, she had a straightforward nature that was like cutting bamboo—his ex-classmate, Ogata Matake.

"MISAKI, FIGHTO!" "FIGHTO!" "FIGHTO!" "FIGHTO!" "MISAKI, FIGHTO!" "FIGHTO!" "FIGHTO!" "FIGHTO!" "FIGHTO!"—

Each of them continued to call out one by one, and everyone shouted back in response. Those people seemed to be the students from the girls' volleyball team as they ran through the chilly wing.

" ... "

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As they went past each other, his eyes met Ogata.

However,

She immediately looked away, and then, he could only see the side of the face, and then, the back.

Her expression did not change at all, and it's likely that she did not have any feeling in her heart as well. She wasn't paying any attention at all as she just treated this as something forgettable after a turn around the corner. She continued to run forward as per normal.

This was completely expected, and understandable.

But even so, he felt hurt deep inside.

It couldn't be helped. He could only laugh.

"...Fufu."

He laughed, seemingly realizing that he could use his laughter for that as well.

He knew that this wouldn't be able to calm the pain inside him, but he still laughed.

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And just like that, he turned away from the school and went somewhere else.

Back to the east.

Should he return back to that place on the way? He hesitated about that on the way.

(But what can I do when I go back there?)

Just the matter with Ogata alone made him so depressed.

Does he want to continue to experience this pain again ?

(What should I do?)

He reached the fork at the road.

One place would allow him to reach 'there' if he continued to work down.

The other side leads to the north-east direction, and he would reach his destination right now.

(It's pointless even if we meet now.)

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Completely contrary from the yearning to meet, he continued to walk down road.

His strong emotions made him fear the outcome all the more.

But even though he knew that, he could only succumb to that fear.

He still couldn't go back.

(If I want to meet them, I have to wait until everything's over.)

There was only one path he could choose.

He proceed on to the north-east direction.

Not a far distance away, that road was linked with the central traffic of Misaki City.

The giant metal bridge that crossed the Mana River, the MISaki Bridge.

It was a bridge with wide pedestrian pathways on both sides, and both sides comprised of 3 car lanes that extend out from the middle that had thick cables coming

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out, link the two huge A-shape bridges from both left and right...

This was the place where he walked through many, many times, before and after he became like this, the place that was brim-filled with memories. He did not come here to cross the scenery, but came here to watch the scenery.

Under the digital clock on the west side, he saw that it was time to go home from work, and there were a lot of pedestrians on the road. The torches that he could normally see amongst the crowd seemed to have disappeared. After Khamsin's tuning, lots of torches disappeared, and the rest of them seemed to be expended with time.

He recalled that scene he once saw before, the sight of the abnormal world that had little lit flames moving around.

The numerous scratches left behind by the 'Denizens', moving around on the streets.

(Since there were so many...it's not weird for the 'Reiji Maigo' to be transferred here at all.)

The base of the 'Lord' that left these scratches behind could be seen from here.

That's the building that was right on the other side of the bridge, and the tallest building in the city, the old Yoda building.

An abandoned building that was left there because the headquarters moved somewhere else.

'The Hunter' Friagne, who snuck into this high-rised building, tried to use the secret spell 'City Devourer' to engulf the entire Misaki City. He had wits and power, multiple treasure tools and 'Rinnes' that brought this threat...every time he recalled it, he felt that it was scarier than walking on tightrope, and that it could only be called a miracle victory.

(I was such an insignificant...simple torch.)

That significant him took such a miracle-like victory, and muttered those words he said when he thought that he would vanish,

"No matter what I am, and no matter what I'll become, I still want to do this."

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Right now, he existed as according to what he said, and he realized this.

(At that time, I did it for that girl.)

When they first met, he saw the girl dancing on the metal handrail. The girl's graceful appearance was etched in his mind.

(And now—it's the same—)

He suddenly had the urge, and jumped onto the handrail.

Just like how that girl did.

He did not know how to dance, thus, he could only play around like a child, 10m away from the bottom. He started jumping about and spinning with everyone giving him strange looks.

(I'm here already.)

He arrived at the base of the middle of the A-shaped bridge. He jumped off hard and disappeared from the crowd.

(So I'm already grown so much that I could come here, is it?)

The boy looked down at the crowd who were shocked by the boy's disappearance.

He let his feet stick on the walls of the main tower.

At the beginning of summer, Misaki City was attacked by a pair of 'Denizen' siblings who activated a large Fuzetsu. 'One who loved himself' Sorath, 'One who loved others' Tiriell, and 'Thousand Changes' Sydonay, who acted as their escort.

At that time, he knew that he had the important treasure tool that could support their power, and was left on this main tower. But even though he knew, he couldn't do anything at all. The only thing he could do was to look down blankly at the maintenance ladder that was located far above him.

(The only thing that I could do was to say a bluff that was immediately seen through.)

Right now, he was standing casually over here.

He did not use the ladder, but stood on the wall.

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(But it's because of the interfering actions of that 'Thousand Changes' that I was able to be here.

All sorts of joy were mixed in, but his heart did not race. It merely became complicated.

Slowly, he walked up the wall, step by step.

Unknowingly, the sun went west, and the sunset that was colored like blood dyed the bridge, the riverbanks, and the entire Misaki City red.

He felt extremely happy that he was walking under such a scene step by step.

(It's so far away.)

He, who felt like he was scattered in this world, could finally stand on the same level as that girl.

(But I'm finally here.)

He walked down the long path that was far different from what he would take in his everyday life, under this fiery red glow of sunset. They met again.

(I'm already here.)

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He used the intense emotions that was burning and harbored within him, and called out with his voice.

The girl was standing on the main tower on the other side, dressed in the Misaki High School uniform.

He smiled with honest emotions, and called her name,  
“Shana.”



“Yuji.”

Shana’s eyes and hair were still black as she answered the boy who was standing on the twoer on the other side.

His body didn’t look like it changed specially. No matter whether it was the body, the attitude, or the clothing, they look extremely normal.

However, this extremely normal appearance was giving off an extremely abnormal sense of existence and anomaly.

Shana understood it.

Right now, this painful feeling was the same as those of the ‘Denizens’.

She understood it, but didn’t want to admit it.

She did not want to admit that this boy in front of her had become an existence that was completely different from before.

But even though she didn’t want to admit it, she had to fight him.

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It's because he was the same as the 'Denizens' who were ruining the peace of the world.

And she was a Flame Haze who was born to erase this existence.

Right now, what she could only do was to watch the enemy silently and delay the start of the battle a bit.

And what replaced that bit was from her heart,

"Who are you?"

Alastor asked a direct question with a clear tone.

Both towers were tens of meters away from each other, but existences that surpassed humans could talk easily.

As if proving this, Yuji's smile had a little lamenting in it as he answered,

"To think that you can't even recognize me. That's too sad... 'Flames of Heaven'."

The voice still belonged to the boy, but the tone changed completely. Alastor couldn't read into 'his' intentions, and asked in surprise,

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“What did you say?”

He immediately used the translating spell ‘Conveyed Words’ to read into ‘his’ intentions, but still couldn’t understand.

The answer didn’t seem incomplete, as the object that looked like boy let out a voice,

“No...it’s to be expected that you didn’t know. The voices of this world, the words that were said. Perhaps you never heard about it directly since you came to this world later than me.”

“What?”

Alastor changed the rising uneasiness in his heart into a voice and said it out.”

“What are you—”

At this moment—

“It’s the toy that 3-eyed granny made, right—that thing that had the ‘silver’ inside it.”

Margery’s voice could be heard from afar.

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Marchosias let out a low bellow,

“You really don’t know how to learn your lesson...we’  
ll catch you this time and make you talk.”

Yuji saw the ‘Chanter of Elegies’, who looked like she was ready to fight, but was actually observing him closely,

“It seems that he was brainwashed or controlled by someone unconsciously de arimasu.”

“Immature acts.”

And then, ‘Manipulator of Objects’ Wilhelmina and Tiamat were staring at him coldly and yet angrily deep inside.

They form a triangle around Shana, who’s facing forward, and standing on both sides of the riverbank behind him.

Seeing this surrounding, Yuji couldn’t help but give a bitter smile.

“So the communication officer did contact you, is it?”

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Though he reverted back to the tone that fitted his age, the boy looked extremely confident for someone his age. Margery launched an attack with a fact.

“Un, Keisaku sent it over.”

“!”

Even Yuji was shocked by this fact. To Margery, this was actually a little test to see if she could rattle the enemy psychologically and show if there were signs of brainwashing. However, he just said with a heavy tone that seemed like he blamed his good friend.

“Communication officer...was that so...why did he do such a dangerous thing. During this time when war’s about to break out, he actually leaped into the fire. His frivolous attitude should have a limit.”

“It’s because you—”

Margery however felt angry at that young man, and inadvertently roared,

“IT’S BECAUSE YOU DISAPPEARED—!”

“!!...Is that...so.”

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Vaguely understanding what was going on, the boy revealed a painful look, but immediately smiled,

“That Satou, he decided to walk down his own path, is it? If that’s the case, I can’t blame him then...no, actually, should I respect his decision and be happy for him...?”

The person standing on the other river saw that he wished his good friend well,

“That’s really an arrogant way of saying things de arimasu.”

“How haughty.”

Wilhelmina and Tiamat said that in disgust, and also felt rather bothered deep inside.

Right now, his actions didn’t seem to lack self-awareness like someone being controlled. Rather, his actions seem to have a certain intention behind them as he took action with such a firm will. This strong self-awareness was really mystifying and inexplicable.

The mysterious boy—yes, that Sakai Yuji who seemed to have some intentions, apologized as if he was here then.

“I’m sorry, Carmel-san.”

But after apologizing, he didn’t just stop there.

“But in order to do what I have to do next, this little arrogance and motivation is definitely required.”

On hearing that voice, Alastor again asked, not at the puppet who was controlled, but at the certain existence who had the main body.

“Are, are you really Sakai Yuji?”

“Aahh, yes, this is Sakai Yuji.”

He continued to answer with the strange tone.

“However, that’s the common name in this world. Of course I do have my real name.”

Yuji said that with another tone as he chuckled, not revealing where his main body was in the process.

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“You say...your real name?”

Alastor didn't feel happy.

This real name would mean the original name in the ‘Crimson Realm’. Taking Alastor for example, the meaning ‘burn everything to nothing’ would be translated as ‘Flames of Heaven’ in this world’s language to distinguish the identity. (Another name ‘Alastor’ was more commonly used in this world, and the origin and usage of the names of each ‘Denizen’ would be different as well).

Also, he was an existence of the laws of the ‘Denizens’ world, or a ‘God’ level. He would naturally feel repulsed that something that was created for a certain purpose would have a real name.

And Yuji, who was the one created, smiled.

“You seemed to be mistake.”

Yuji guessed correctly what this ‘Crimson’ God who lived for a long time was thinking, and explained with another tone,

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“I am of a different existence from that created ‘silver’. ‘Those things’ were just mechanisms for me to show my will to the world, and it was just one of them...on the contrary, the me right now have the right to call myself with my real name.”

“What did you say?”

“Exactly what I said.”

He turned his back on Margery, who was bothered and wanted to know his true identity,

“Then, what are you,”

“Who.”

Wilhelmina and Tiamat started to feel suspicious, and raised their alert level as they face this threat.

“Well, you’ll understand after seeing that.”

Yuji just looked at Shana, who kept silent ever since she said the first sentence, and smiled,

“Yes, this flame.”

---

Amidst the bloody-red sunset that was gradually darkness—his shadow suddenly let out an abnormal ‘silver’ color.

“Fuzetsu.”

The moment he said that, the flames quick filled up the neighboring spaces, and swallowed up this wide area. The flames that had tremendous pressure in them drew a strange pattern on the ground, and formed a hemisphere object that looked like a sun at his forehead.

The color of the flames that came out wasn’t silver.

It was a color anyone could understand.

It was something that could swallow everything—black.

At the high levels of the old Yoda building, the miniature model was surrounded by the toy blocks that were stacked up high.

“Was, was that a fuzetsu?”

Tanaka let out a trembling voice.

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This miniature model, the surveillance treasure tool ‘Haridan’ that accurately depicted the exterior of Misaki City, showed a strange pattern on it.

No matter how it looked, that was a terrifying scene.

Notably, Tanaka would be traumatized by the Fuzetsu itself. But even so,

“Yoshida, san...?”

He could still show concern, or rather, perhaps it was because there was someone he had to show concern towards that he could maintain as himself. Right now, Satou, who he could push that responsibility to, wasn’t here, and he took this spot.

“I, I’m alright”

Yoshida, who was asked, didn’t look like it was nothing at all.

(This couldn’t be helped, I guess.)

While concerned for his good friend, Tanaka looked at the middle of the miniature model, the light that was flickering at the main tower.

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The sounds that the Flame Hazes let out were all from the tag Tanaka was hold, and it was a talisman that allowed them to move in the Fuzetsu. They could hear Shana say the words 'Yuji', and the moment that happened, Yoshida was about to collapse. However, she barely managed to take that shock (or at least it looked at way), and sat at a corner.

(Normally, she would be running off to see him.)

He couldn't hear the unique characteristic of the voice, and would there be a good outcome in this situation, or a bad one...? What did Yuji say, and what thoughts did he bring when he came back here? The tag did not transmit those words to him. It seemed that the Flame Hazes couldn't understand as well, and that was what he could understand. Also, this Fuzetsu.

(Black, flames, is it?)

That was a flame that could not separate the darkness even when it came from down below, a fear that was based from something, and something that was seen for the first time even if it wasn't Tanaka; a flame 'without light'.

---

Shaking this uneasiness away, he wanted to solve this case and get his friend back. The boy placed his hope on the three light spots on the miniature models.

(Ane-san, Shana-chan, Carmel-san, please...)

He looked down at the 'Haridan' below him. Even though it was a treasure tool that was used for surveillance, what it showed was only humans, torches and spells. It couldn't detect Flame Hazes and 'Denizens'. Right now, the only reason why he could see the triangle surrounding Yuji in the middle was due to the tag Margery gave him.

The duty Tanaka was tasked with was to spot any strange jizaishiki or jizaiho in the 'Haridan' and immediately report. But right now, there wasn't any spell other than the fuzetsu.

Tanaka widened his long and narrow eyes, and looked at the movements on the main tower.

(What are you doing, Sakai...didn't you say that you want to protect this city!?)

He felt angry and hurt that his good friend came back as an enemy. Facing that loneliness that felt like he was

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abandoned, Tanaka wanted to cry out even though the tears did not come from his shaken beliefs, and inadvertently used his sleeve to wipe his eyes.

(You're so strong and amazing. Why did you become the fang of the 'Denizens'...even, even this weak and shameful me would still endure this fear to live, so why!?)

Inside this 'Haridan' that surrounded him, the miniature model of Misaki City was shown. Tanaka understood how puny and weak he was, and thus felt the need and importance to protect even more.

(If it were me, I wouldn't be able to take that just now.)

He looked at Misaki High, which was located in a corner of the room.

That was the place of close-call, where he heard that Yuji and Ogata met.

(I'm different from you. To me, this is really too much.)

He thought of what he said was important to him.

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That was to the girl who said 'I like you' to him, and also, to this city.

(Why, at this time, that Satou—)

He started to feel jealous of his good friend who wasn't here.

(Satou, he—)

While bearing the immense pressure that was torturing him, he unknowingly realized it.

(Satou, he left...why, why was he able to leave this place?)

It's because he felt this pain all over his body that he finally realized it.

It wasn't just that he witnessed a tragedy or not. What was the difference between him and his good friend?

Wouldn't that difference be shown through his friend's act of leaving this city?

Was the thing he really wanted to protect different from this fear of his now?

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He did not waver when he chose to leave for Outlaw, and wasn't this part of the reason?

Wasn't this also part of the reason why he felt extremely jealous?

(Satou, the thing he wanted to protect. Was it,)

Tanaka recalled the time when Satou and him were still naïve and would say that,

"Let's go off with Margery Daw."

They admired her, and trained themselves, rushing into battle whenever there was one, and trying to help her to the best of their abilities. To them, she was such a charismatic existence.

But the coolness Satou showed did not have the fiery feeling that caused him to go crazy.

(Did I just realize that?)

Not only did he take the first step, he changed his own way of existence, and Tanaka seemed to realize the other reason they were different. "Was I jealous because of that?"

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As for why he did not sort it out or even realize it, it was because of the difference in the term 'like'. To Tanaka, his feelings for Margery, were...right, completely different from the one he had for Ogata. As his admiration for her was too great, he did not think too much into it.

(But Satou, he...)

Wasn't he the 'same'.

At this moment, he finally thought of it.

(Was the reason why I felt so envious because of this.)

Satou Keisaku. As a guy, he fell in love with that woman Tanaka admired, the woman who was a symbol of power.

That was why he chose to leave the city without hesitation and went straight for Outlaw.

Tanaka Eita saw his good friend like this, this boy who used to be in the same state as him, and felt jealous. And he knew that now.

(So was that why I was so unhappy? Damn it!)

It's true that Satou was rather cool...but to Tanaka, he felt that the feeling he had for his friend wasn't jealousy. The reason why he was trembling was because he was about to bear such a huge thing. It was because he knew the importance of this thing. He tried his best to encourage himself, and at worst, he wanted to act cool for a while.

(Ane-san, please catch that Sakai and bring him to Satou.)

With a pale expression and a trembling body, Tanaka Eita continued to stare at the 'Haridan'.

He did not know the meaning behind the long silence after the Fuzetsu appeared.

"\_\_"

After seeing something that should be impossible, Alastor was stunned.

"Alas, tor...?"

Shana seemed to realize the meaning behind his silence and prompted him to speak.

However, the voice that would normally explain things to her calmly wasn't heard.

Margery and Marchosias, Wilhelmina and Tiamat; everyone all felt that this scene in front of them were completely bewildered as they could only stand around in shock.

Yuji, who dyed the sunset black, let his body float in the air.

"This is my flame."

He raised his right arm forward as if he put on a cape that couldn't be seen. The arm that was extremely tight then swung out to the side.

At that moment,

The black flames that covered the arm wrapped around the boy's body, and at the same time, it disappeared.

What was left in the air was a mysterious person in a strange outfit.

“And ‘this’, is my real body.”

The things he was wearing were a thick armor and a loose piece of clothing. They were completely red.

And on the back of the head, what grew out like long hair was a pitch black dragon tail.

“My title...would be ‘Snake of the Festival’ Sakai Yuji.”

Looking up at the boy who changed into an abnormal outfit, Alastor slowly repeated the enemy’s title.

“—‘Snake of the, Festival’?”

After repeating it

“DID YOU JUST SAY ‘SNAKE OF THE FESTIVAL’!? IMPOSSIBLE!!”

He roared out with disbelief in his tone.

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On the other hand, Shana still couldn't understand the current situation, and could only mutter the meaning of that real name,

“...‘God of Creation’...”

It was a long time ago.

Ever since they found a way to come to this world, numerous ‘Crimson Denizens’ were instantly delighted and soon began roaming to ‘that neighboring world they didn’t manage to get to’, and found this paradise where they would fulfill their wishes and whims whatever they wanted.

They did not think about the idea of ‘invasion’. They were simply curious and thirsty for knowledge, overwhelmed by primitive desire, and a want to understand this world. No matter how much their ambition were, and no matter whether they were ‘Denizens’ who had a hard time surviving in the ‘Crimson Realm’, or a powerful ‘Lord’ who attained that honor, they came into this world for their own reasons.

Amongst them was the ‘Snake of the Festival’, one of the ‘Gods’ who was viewed as an embodiment of the

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laws in the 'Crimson Realm'. This wasn't just a coincidence, and neither was it a natural outcome. He had a unique power, the ability to create and assert, a decisive power.

"In other words, they were naturally attracted to the new discovery and progress made by their fellow comrades, and also, the interaction with a primitive start, and came to this world....all because he was the God of Creation."

Sounding a little lost, Alastor used an extremely heavy tone and said,

"He was able to create anything, and led the Trinity into this world, making many comrades happy. He took them under his wing."

No matter whether it was good or evil, nothing matter to him. The reason why he became a God was because he wanted to enter unexplored land and get what he wanted.

"But, he got overwhelmed by his own power, and couldn't even let go of the way the world existed, and was caused in an 'eternal trap' some ancient Flame Hazes personally set."

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That's right. He, who scattered all sorts of supernatural things in the other world, was tripped hard.

After he was tripped, he was banished, or rather, that was supposed to be the case.

"That 'mytical God' who was banished by that spell of no return...why did he appear here?"

"That was supposed to be a crevice in the world where all laws don't apply, and even Gods shouldn't be able to get out of there..."

Margery muttered about that 'God Killing' incident.

"Is it because of 'Bal Masque'...did the masterless group started to take action de arimasu?"

"An unexpected twist."

Wilhelmina looked somewhat awkward as she looked like she did not know what to do about this sudden unexpected development in front of her.

And this impossible existence started to close in on the main tower Shana was standing on.

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“Shana.”

She heard the person with Yuji’s appearance call her name, and saw that the monster with the silhouette she wanted close in on her. Shana couldn’t help but feel extremely repulsed and her legs inadvertently tried to back away.

“NO!”

She straightened her back, and went forward.

At the same time, the black in her eyes and hair fade off as they immediately became crimson red. Dressed in the black ‘Yogasa’, she drew her nodachi ‘Nietono no Shana’, which scattered lots of firedust. The ‘Flame-Haired Burning-Eyed Hunter’ Shana answered the enemy with her words and action.

“You’re not Yuji.”

“Shana.”

Yuji watched the graceful and heroic presence of the girl who he really admired strongly, swallowed the tension and stiffness only he could understand, and narrowed his eyes as if he understood the meaning

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behind it. He continued to maintain his speed as he closed in and answered,

“No, this is Sakai Yuji.”

He slowly reached out his arm that was covered by the thick armor.

And it looked like he wanted to grab this girl who was trying her best to be in front of him, but looking obviously stiff.

“Shana—!”

Just as he called out, he felt a figure flew up. Yuji turned in mid-air, and the dragontail behind his head struck out at the speed of a flint, striking Margery, who ambushed him, in the lower abdomen.

At this moment,

“Mu!?”

The slender female’s body shattered like glass, and the spell that was used to form it wrapped around the dragon tail. On recovering, he realized that the long and thick dragontail was stuck tightly in the air.

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Yuji pulled it out forcefully. GAKUN! He lost his balance.

“Make or break!”

Wilhelmina flew down from above him, and shot a large torrent of ribbons down at him.

DODODODODODO! Numerous bands pierced through Yuji’s body, and he fell from right in front of Shana.

“YUJI!”

Shana shouted. Slightly far below her, a ‘thud’ collision sound could be heard.

Wilhelmina was right beside her, descending and letting out cherry-blossom colored firedust. She’s wearing a fox like mask and a mane that was formed by the ribbon, looking really glamorous in a battle outfit.

“Say that after we capture him de arimasu.”

“A dangerous existence.”

Tiamat, who changed into the mask, let out a short and simple warning.

“That’s right!”

The other voice came from the flame jacket that was standing above the main tower, looking like a beast. That’s the ‘Toga’ battle mode of the ‘Chanter of Elegies’.

“No matter whether he’s a real or a fake, he’s a monster who proclaimed himself to be able to ‘split the sky and swallow the ground’! We were fooled by him—and don’t know what’s going on as well!!”

The flame beast continued to throw extremely large fireballs at Yuji without holding back, creating a large explosion. The people and vehicles on the bridge that were stopped by the Fuzetsu was blown into the Mana River.”

However, in the center of that sea of fire.

A figure slowly floated up from the large hole that was left opened by the Misaki Bridge. That was a boy covered

completely in black flames. His clothing and skin weren't showing any burns, and his armor and dragontail were unscathed as well.

Margery clicked her tongue.

"He's not easy to due with after all!"

"What's the point of saying such deflating words, my iron first Margery Daw. Since our kiddo came back here, the best plan is to hurry up and deal with him and let him apologize to this Missy here."

Alastor finally recovered from his shock, and murmured in a heavy tone,

"Uu...but even so—"

KANK! The sound of metal colliding could be heard.

"How unfortunate."

The heavy voice came closer.

"I was just looking for Shana."

Yuji was standing on the top of the main tower. Shana was inadvertently shocked.

Standing beside her, Wilhelmina looked obvious shocked as well.

“Mu!?”

Margery, who was standing on the main tower opposite, couldn’t help but shout,

“This is—”

Their eyes were clouded by a thick silver.

With Yuji’s ascent, numerous armor shrapnel, gears, springs, cranks and all sorts of weird things were mashed together, forming a large murky current that continued to rise with the momentum of a flood or an explosion as it covered the land. The turbidity reached the top before closing down, wrapping the entire middle section of the Misaki Bridge in the middle, forming a huge ball-shaped cage that had the two main towers in it.

There were only two people who were able to get out of this lock.

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These two people were holding hands.

“Shana.”



“Yu, ji!”

Her crimson wings burning on her back, Shana stared at Yuji with her burning eyes for several seconds as she floated in the air,

“—LET GO OF ME!!”

She frowned and forcefully shook her hand away.

Yuji was somewhat surprised, but immediately let out a playful smile.

“Didn’t you want to capture me, ‘Flames of Heaven’?”

“Is that really you... ‘Snake of the Festival’?”

This existence in front of him was his fellow comrade who was banished into a netherland while he was still in the ‘Crimson Realm’, and also, an existence whose power was on par with him. Alastor was obviously shocked that he was unexpectedly alive, and even his voice sounded rather unnatural.

“Is that get-up of yours some prank of your own whims?”

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"This isn't a prank. To both of us, this is important."

"DON'T SAY THAT IN YUJI'S VOICE!!"

Shana pointed the 'Nietono no Shana' at the throat that was making the boy's tone. The tip of the sword didn't look like it was trembling, just abnormally stiff.

"..."

"..."

Both of them looked at each other, one smiling, one angry. These two contrasting expressions were glaring at each other.

After a few seconds, Yuji casually said the decisively words.

"Shana, come along with me."

"!?"

The girl frowned hard, and the sword felt even more stiff now as it didn't move. Yuji continued,

"I'm here to pick you up."

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“You bastard...!”

Alastor finally realized the intention of the ‘Snake of the Festival’, and felt the viciousness that was involved in it. He immediately felt enraged.

The only one who could stop the God of Creation was the God of Punishment, the ‘Flames of Heaven’, who, as a God, had the right to judge and punish. The only one who could exert the full power of the God of Punishment was the contractor, the ‘Flame-Haired Burning-eyed Hunter’.

Thus, he came here to capture Shana.

Borrowing, or rather, using the body of the boy Shana loved.

That was his aim.

“I want to continue living with you.”

“—hy.”

“?”

Shana forced out a weak voice.

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“—Why?”

The sword tip, which was stiff a moment back, went out of control as she heard the words she wanted to hear the most.

It was more than what she could take, and she collapsed.

“Why are you saying this now?”

“No, because it’s now, I was able to say it.”

Yuji said firmly as he faced the trembling sword.

“And because, it’s now...”

He said that and held the sword, raising it up slowly.

And right below both of them.

“!”

A tremor echoed violently.

Yuji looked down. At a part of the silver-colored prison, cracks were formed inside, and the pressure

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tugged at it. the two people who were stuck inside seemed to be struggling to get out.

“As expected, this level of restraint would most likely—Shana!?”

What happened next wasn't what he expected.

Shana flew down quickly like she fell from the sky.

Shana—the ‘Flame-Haired Burning-Eyed Hunter’ chose to run away.

“Is that, so.”

Yuji sighed and started to fly down to the Mana River surface that was far below him.

“Looks like I can only do this now.”

Though he did not really intend to chase her, after thinking through it, the aim was the same in the end.

He'll capture her and then take her back.

He just needed to follow the plan.

The surface of the Mana River in front of him was closing in.

At this moment, he could already see the bright red wings that left the trail of flames.

“Wait, Shana!”

While saying that, he reached his hand out, and black flames appeared on his hand, forming a snake-shaped thing as it flew at the girl.

On finding her pursuer, Shana was stunned.

“!”

Just when she was about to touch the surface of the water, an explosion occurred below her feet, and the water that flew blocked her line of sight, causing her to change her direction.

The flaming snake hit the surface of the water, and new explosions of steam continued to occur.

Covered in this area of thick steam.

“You’ll bother me here if you interfere with me...  
Margery-san.”

Keeping a constant distance as he followed Shana from behind, Yuji said softly. It seemed that these words weren’t aimed at Shana, but at Margery, who was about to break through the cage.

“Can’t you please remain there quietly for a while?”

“HOW CAN WE POSSIBLY STAY AROUND LIKE THIS  
!!”

Inside the silver prison, Margery's crude roar echoed throughout the air.

The mouth of the Toga was breathing out the anger that was stored inside her, letting out the blueish firedust that showed her power. After taking a deep breath, the ' Chanter of Elegies' started to create the speciality spell ' Improvised Poem of Slaughter'.

**“Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall!”**

Margery sang,

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**"Humpty Dumpty had a great fall!"**

Marchosias then echoed.

**"All the King's horses!!"**

**"And all the King's men!!"**

As they continued to sing, the voice started to become even louder.

**"Couldn't put humpty dumpty—together again!"**

Once Margery finished singing, numerous spells flew out of her mouth.

These spells stuck onto what look like an egg shell that were formed together by mirrors as they immediately spread to the surrounding. They spread to the surroundings, creating vortexes, causing the shell to distort. For a while, it looked like they were about to break out of it.

Wilhelmina wasn't going to stand back as well.

**"HAA!"**

The hardened ribbons formed several spears as they thrust out all over the shell. Of course, the ribbons weren't just ordinary spears. The jizaiho of cherry blossomed-colored firedust flew all over the place as they removed the spell, preventing the shell from regenerating itself.

After a few times, the thick silver cage soon started to create, and amidst the cracks, they could see the outside.

Suddenly, inside the cage,

<Margery-san.>

Yuji's voice echoed throughout the cage.

"Yuji!"

<Please listen to me.>

"Chanter of Elegies—"

"I got it!"

A battle-dressed Wilhelmina and Margery, who was dressed in the Toga, started to be wary. Both of them were ready for any attacks or changes, but they couldn't feel the enemy attacking.

<After coming here, I realized this.>

Only the echoes could be heard.

On hearing this voice that still belonged to the boy, and yet had the signature tones of Yuji and the 'Snake of the Festical', the irritated Margery started to lash out at the uneasiness around here.

“HUMPH! SEEMS LIKE YOU KNOW HOW TO SWEETTALK A WOMAN, YUJI! DO YOU WANT TO BECOME A HAREM KING!?”

<At this point, I can't do that.>

The voice that echoed back did not seem to have any emotions in them.

<More than that, you have something you are more worried about, right? It's regarding the 'silver'...>

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“!!!”

Not expecting the enemy to mention this, Margery tensed up and concentrated, not letting herself to miss out on this.

Wilhelmina, who had her back facing Margery's back, heard Yuji raise such a topic out of a sudden, even though he should be battling with Shana right now, and the face under the mask inadvertently looked shocked.

(Why is he talking about that now?)

(STOP IT!!)

The voiceless cry of her partner and Marchosias' shout rang out.

Wilhelmina finally realized it.

The enemy mentioned about this 'silver', not because it was a slip of a tongue, but because he deliberately mentioned. What if, what if this was the case? If the enemy knew that this was information Margery would want to know even if she would give up the chance to escape, and use this to set the trap? The enemy's not anyone else, but that boy—that Sakai Yuji who knew all

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the strengths and weaknesses of the Flame Hazes in Misaki City!!

(No!!)

She moved the Toga from behind, risking herself to a back attack.

“Don't listen to him de arimasu!”

However, Margery shook her off instinctively.

“QUIET DOWN!”

“IT'S DANGEROUS STUFF!”

<Okay, I'll tell you...first—>

“!?”

“!?”

The 4 beings in two bodies froze.

<Please look around.>

Actually, they didn't need any reminder.

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The silver shell that surrounded them...became a western armor that was all dirty.

And that armor looked like it was leaning against a glass wall as it laid prone on the shell, looking at the Flame Hazes inside. The eyes behind the armor...the numerous eyes, eyes, eyes were staring at them.

“——!!”

Margery's cry of fear echoed throughout the sky.

Inside the area that was covered in the black Fuzetsu, Shana and Yuji continued to run.

Leaping off the roofs, past the fence, and landing in the garden.

“More than that, you have something you are more worried about, right? It's regarding the 'silver'... ”

Then, he quickly jumped low in an agile manner.

“Okay, I'll tell you...first—”

On hearing Yuji's soft words, Shana felt the same sense of danger Wilhelmina did.

“YUJI!”

To prevent him from continuing further, Shana quickly kicked off the roof, spun quickly at a tight angle, and launched an attack at him.

Yuji released a flame serpent at the wall of an apartment beside him to evade the attack, and continued to explain,

“Please look around.”

After saying that, he landed on the 3-storeyed residence, and then leaped up. Shana's strike that was swung out landed right in front of him, but he dodged it perfectly.

Just when his back was about to hit the wall, Yuji used the burst of explosion at his feet to leave the ground, and the dragontail behind his head smacked the floor, letting the recoil send him up. However, he did not stop explaining.

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“This thing that looks like armor wasn't a 'Denizen', but something that was gathered and materialized from the emotions of humans. That's a reflection of all sorts of intense emotions from all over the world, from all the ages. And that, that's the reflection of the heart people often talk about...”

Yuji stood on the roof of the apartment, waiting for the girl to attack.

“These numerous fragments that were gathered were important persons that were necessary to form my personality.”

As he said this, Shana used her crimson red wings to accelerate right in front of him, and descended at the speed of a bullet.

Yuji showed a burning passion of delight as he awaited it, and then swung the dragontail behind him as he attacked Shana.

“This armor—”

The dragontail that was like an iron whip swept the air and cracked it like thunder. However, Shana was faster as she flew straight down.

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Yuji dodged it without hesitation, and Shana kicked the apartment building behind him in half. As the dust flew, Yuji walked onto the tilted roof, and continued to talk.

“It was just a way of living, duplicating the feelings of someone who had intense emotions in a situation, and acting on the wishes and hopes of the person. The me who was created like that was just an object.”

He said that and jumped to avoid the explosion that came from below.

“!?”

The explosions that blew up suddenly formed the shape of a sword, which then shrank back and created a huge explosion.

Yuji, was got hit by the attack at such a close distance, went down the road in a straight line and knocked at the riverside like pebbles being thrown out. The bits of the grey ground lined the path, and numerous vehicles on the road were blown away.”

“Your representative was the person you hated. The mockery you heard was the hidden feelings in your heart.”

But even after being attacked, Yuji's voice didn't stop.

Shana leaped out of the explosion and looked with her blazing eyes. Yuji's body was wrapped by the dragon tail many times, forming a ball, a protective wall. It didn't seem like there was any visible damage.

“Do you understand? The 'silver' that appeared in front of you was—”

Yuji shook his head slightly, kept his dragon tail back, floated slowly into the air, looked at Shana,

And then continued casually,

“—It just did the thing that you wanted to do for you.”

And just like that, he dealt a fatal blow to Margery.

After a few seconds of silence,

“It's over.”

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“Yuji...!”

The smile on Yuji's face didn't change at all, and Shana's anger was completely shown. Yuji then said casually,

“Let me add on. I sent the 'silver' to stop Carmel-san and the rest. Even she needs a really long time to get here if she wants to bring Margery-san out in her current state.”

“...”

Shana tried her best to control herself, and swallowed the words that were in her mouth and yet unwilling to say them out.

Yuji ignored the girl's feelings in regards to this and smiled, showing a very happy look. He calmly said as if this blessing finally arrived,

“Now, we can finally be together alone.”

“...Yuji...”

That was the limit already.

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Shana was extremely sad. At this point, she had to say the final declaration she really did not want to say.

"I, I will destroy you."

"..."

This time, it's Yuji's turn to be silent.

He lowered his head and closed his eyes, and then looked straight at Shana.

The joy in his heart didn't seem to fade, but his face did seem to be extremely tight.

"...Un, I got it."

He looked at the tip of the nodachi 'Nietono no Shana' that was pointed at him, and swung his arm.

At the end of this motion, a one-handed broadsword appeared in his hand.

That's the treasure tool 'Blutsauger'.

It used to be the weapon of the enemy 'Denizen', the 'One who Loved Himself' Sorath. It later ended up in

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Margery and Satou's hands, and finally in Yuji's hands. This broadsword took one huge round before landing in Yuji's hands, and now, it's pointed at Shana.

Sadness and happiness, two expressions that were distant were staring at each other.

“—”

“—”

Both of them crouched down and flew forward.

The distance they would see was decreasing.

“HAA!”

“YA!”

KLANG!!

The sound of metal weapons breaking could be heard as both swords clashed in mid-air. The sparks that were caused by the friction grazed each other's faces, and the air had crimson red and black firedust all over the place. Both parties' bodies recoiled back due to the impact.

Shana continued to fire flame bullets even when she was backing away, and Yuji flew low in the gaps between the buildings, easily dodging the attacks.

The buildings that were in turn were taken away by the sea of crimson fire.

“Shana, you won't will yourself to me, right?”

Amidst the explosion, a sigh could be heard.

Shana chased him from behind and bellowed,

“Shut up!”

“So, the only thing between us would be this battle.”

The moment he said that, Yuji smacked the dragontail onto the road, spun jumped up.

Shana knew the characteristic of the broadsword 'Blutsauger' that was swung at all, and took half a second to graze past the blade, spin around and shout,

“SHUT UP!”

“I'll fight, and through this path, I'll come to you—”

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“I SAID SHUT UP!!!”

Shana did not let Yuji continue.

Yuji remained silent.

In the air, the crimson wings spun aside, went past Yuji's shoulder instantaneously, grazed past his back, and used the 'Nietono no Shana' to strike immediately.

However,

Yuji turned around to attack the moment she grazed past him as well. Between the clothes that were flipped up, the 'Blutsauger' quickly swung out to land a critical hit as Yuji aimed at this particular moment.

As the blades clashed, the bloody-red patterns appeared on the broad blade of the broadsword.

“Gu, ku!”

Shana had huge wounds on her arms. The treasure tool 'Blutsauger's ability was to infuse 'Power of Existence' to damage anything it touches.

*I was wary of it, and yet got injured in the process. Maybe I was being too careless. Shana was hurt by her own distracted state and Yuji, who deliberately spoke to distract her. However, Yuji's merciless slashes didn't stop because of that as each hit landed hard.*

"HA!"

"Ku!"

Shana turned away to to dodge it, and while spinning, she used the wings on her back to create an explosive thrust forward, and hacked up in a diagonal manner while spinning at a high speed.

Yuji raised the 'Blutsauger' that was raised, and took the attack that came from afar.

"Gu!"

But in the end, he still extended the dragontail that stretched from behind his head to block it, and struck the tip of the tail with a swung.

Shana took this attack, and used the recoil of being blowing away and the thrust of the crimson wings to pull

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the distance. Then, Yuji came chasing after her. Both of them flew in the air, creating a trail of a large vortex.

(Such a tough guy to handle!)

That wasn't the thought of a girl, but the thought of the 'Flame-Haired Burning-Eyed Hunter'

It seemed that his arm strength was abnormally powerful, as each strike was strangely fast and heavy. In terms of swordsmanship, Shana had an overwhelming advantage, but Yuji's 'Blutsauger' was practically a natural counter for Shana, who mainly uses the sword as a weapon to fight. Also, there's the defensive capability of the dragontil.

(Normally,)

Normally, he, who was pointing the sword at her, would automatically break this deadlock——

(No, I can't think fo that now!)

Shana felt her own weakness, and inadvertently felt shocked and anxious. Ever since she stayed in this city, it

seemed that she acknowledged that he could fight alongside her. Shana infused strength in the wings on her back, wanting to get rid of this relying feeling.

Both of them continued to fly at high speeds, dancing about in the black Fuzetsu that covered the center of Misaki City.

(Yuji knew of my power.)

Normally, she would be happy about that thought, but at this moment, it felt abnormally heavy. She flapped her wings, using the force to thrust aside. She then kept the same speed and spun before shooting out flames, and advanced in a completely opposite direction from a few seconds before.

The speed Shana closed in at shocked Yuji.

KLANG!

As the little flash of swords flashed, both of them went past each other.

The sound of the blades clashing still remained in her ears, but Shana had already turned around.

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“HAA!!”

The crimson nodachi again launched an attack from the sword. That large heat was of a completely different level from an ordinary fireball. The thick fireball went straight at the boy's back, and it quickly expanded after colliding with the enemy. With a thunderclap-like boom, large sparks could be seen.

“\_\_\_\_\_”

“\_\_\_\_\_”

At this moment, the boy wearing the armor and clothes swung his dragontail and quickly closed in with the broadsword in one hand.

“\_\_\_\_\_”

Shana wasn't unfamiliar with the sphere boundary surrounding him.

That's the treasure tool that he used a string to hang around his neck, the anti-fire ring 'Azure'.

(As expected, Yuji really understands my power.)

The strike of the broadsword 'Blutsauger' can't be taken just like that.

If she just released flame bullets or even release a slash of the crimson nodachi, that treasure tool 'Azure' could block them all.

That was the worst counter, and the attack of the treasure tool that was fighting with him released its attack—

(How much can it materialize now?)

Shana's left hand gripped lightly onto the nodachi and attacked, putting her right hand at her waist.

Yuji, who went past her, showed a doubt.

“!?”

“HAAA!?”

“HAAA!!!”

She gathered her concentration, and let out a punch with her right hand.

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The flames shot out from the front, forming a huge fist. The arm then expanded to form a large arm. This wasn't just a simple flame, but a physical punch that was materialized and struck the incoming boy.

“Gu! Guwaah!!”

Yuji was careless as he had a barrier around him, and took the pain from what looked like a flame arm as she got sent away. He flew like a burning meteor and landed at the residence, hitting several apartments before finally stopping.

Shana immediately got ready to make the next attack and flew slowly in the air.

But for some reason, Yuji leaped up and flew above the roof of some residences before stopping.

“...?”

*This level of attack couldn't possibly cause a fatal wound to him. Was it a trap?* Shana wondered for a while, and immediately found her answer.

“—!”

The girl was extremely clear about where the boy was standing at.

Of course, she knew why Yuji chose that place.

Emotions welled up in her, and it's unknown whether it's anger or sadness.

Admst the black Fuzetsu, there was a 2-storeyed house that was covered in darkness.

The doorplate had the words 'Sakai' on it.

At the old Yoda department store building, a scream ripped through the black sky. It's the first time, everyone heard Margery screaming crazily like this.

“A, ANE-SAN, WHAT’S WRONG!?! ANE-SAN!!”

Tanaka pressed on with a trembling voice and tears.

Margery did not respond as she continued to roar out.

On hearing this voice that represented her madness, he inadvertently tensed up, and couldn't even say anything.

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“Ah, ahh...?”

From Marchosias, Tiamat and Wilhelmina’s attitude, she must have been told something horrifying. Though they did see Margery become all savage before, it’s different now. It wasn’t just anger or hatred or the likes that could explain this loss of control of her emotions.

It was a heart that lost control completely, expressed in a scream.

He did not understand this scream at all, whether it was English or some other language or some meaningless scream. All the complicated screams that were incomprehensible gave a bone-chilling feeling...the fear that came with a certain fact that was shown caused goosebumps on his skin.

The fact was that, Margery Daw was crumbling, or rather, she collapsed.

“ANE-SAN, WHAT’S GOING ON!?”

He knew that he couldn’t call her now, but Tanaka couldn’t help but shout out.

“Right now, she’s in a very dangerous situation de arimasu.”

“The worst case scenario.”

That was Wilhelmina’s voice, and it had a tinge of anxiety that wasn’t there normally.

Tanaka shouted at the tag as if it he went crazy,

“WHAT JUST HAPPENED!!?? WHAT’S GOING ON!?”

“She heard some information that shook her up psychologically de arimasu.”

“Risk of self-destruction .”

Though the voice that answered him seemed somewhat flat, that was a false impression given by the battle behavior of the ‘Manipulator of Everything’. Right now, they’re inside the silver prison, fighting against silvers en masse. Normally, each of them is as strong as a Flame Haze, but now they’re swarming in, surrounding

the place completely. No matter how many hundreds of ribbons she shot out, the wall would grow out new arms, and the problem would never be solved.

Or rather, if she was alone, she could probably find a way out. However, Yuji already set a bind on her.

“Please pull yourself through de arimasu!”

“Watch yourself!”

That’s Margery, who’s right beside her and all crazy.

The Flame Haze who was supposed to be awe-inspiring didn’t look like she was calmed down at all. Her hair was messy, tears were all over her face, she was screaming, shouting out madly, and it’s unknown whether she was praying to God or the Devil.

That empty gaze of fantasia was scared and distorted due to the surrounding attacks on her. Her body was controlled by a force, and she lost all control of herself. Of course, she couldn’t concentrate enough to control the Toga now.

The one thing that could most express the crisis was the treasure tool Grimoire, the one evidence of the

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contract a Flame Haze made. The silhouette was somewhat thin, and it felt somewhat thin.

“Not good, the contract’s about to be broken...OI! MARGERY!!!”

The normally frivolous Marchosias shouted at his partner in a rare serious and anxious voice.

“DO YOU WANT TO LET EVERYTHING END HERE LIKE THIS!!?”

The woman who would normally recover after his shout wasn’t here anymore. Margery continued to remain unmoved as she screamed maniacally, and the silhouette of the Grimoire was becoming faint.

(Not good, Margery’s not even listen to what I’m saying now!)

The large amount of ‘Power of Existence’ was seeping from Margery’s body, scattering into firedust as it flew away. The maniacal consciousness that lost all self-control did not know any logic or limits to think as her crazy mental state caused her existence to wear off. If this continued to keep up, in a few minutes, it’s likely that she wouldn’t be able to remain as a Flame Haze.

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<Marchosias! What's going on!! The contract's breaking!? What does this mean—!!>

“My beautiful wine glass’ giving up the right to store wine. She’s dying!!”

Marchosias did not wait until the end for Tanaka’s question as he answered.

<Wha, what...NOOOO!! ANE-SAN!!?>

Margery, who couldn’t hear Tanaka’s shout in her ears already, dreamt of her past.

In the past, she was always relied on by others, and she continued to repay back this trust as she continued to live till now.

(—“OO nee-san, please help me”—)

To her, helping everyone around her was her motivation to live.

She seemed to be like that ever since she was little.

(—“OO-sama, please lend my your power.” —)

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The inept father got help from got help from a girl, and could finally keep his life as the only legitimate child left.

But the moment the little trickster couldn't solve occurred—

(—"OO, I beg of you. As long I can continue to live on, our family" —)

After they released her father, she worked together with a few retainers and used an open city policy to win peace back.

But in the end, her escaped father was killed and her allies betrayed her—

(—"OO-sama, I just want to live on and see that child again." —)

She rallied soldiers that were taken as prisoners and organized a large revolution to escape, and finally managed to do so.

However, she just had to fall to the retainers she saved before.

(—"OO-sama, we just want to continue living. Please forgive us" —)

After they escaped successfully, she was sold to that 'brothel' for just that little amount of money.

And then, over there, the girls who were sold there too said to her—

(—"OO nee-san, please, solve me" —)

She was often relied on by others, and could only continue to assist others. It's unknown when it began, she started building quite the standing amongst them.

It's said that the one who finally destroyed that 'brothel' was herself.

(I really wanted to wreck it, right...did I really wreck the life I lived...?)

Actually, she was sick of it, sick of being requested by others, solving problems for others, living with what little honor she had, she was sick of it all.

She even lost the reason for revenge.

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Because she was already wrecked.

It was already over. Everything.

<—NOOO!!!>

Tanaka's voice shook her ears.

(Stop shouting...are you going to make use of me again?)

Her consciousness was becoming faint due to fatigue, and she just thought callously.

<DON'T DIE!! YOU CAN'T DIE!!!>

It's still Tanaka's voice.

(What do you mean...I can't...)

Now the person who's asking is so arrogant? Just when her thoughts were about to vanish,

<THAT SATOU, HE HADN'T EVEN—>

(!)

Her mind immediately thought of a certain young man who said that he would bet everything on her.

<HE HADN'T DONE ANYTHING FOR YOU!! ISN'T THAT RIGHT, ANE-SAN!!?>

<MARGERY-SAN!!>

This time, it was Yoshida's voice.

<PLEASE! PLEASE RECOVER!!>

(—?)

<YOU GOT SOMEONE'S LOVE ALREADY!!>

Not being relied one—normally speaking, this sincere emotion of wanting to offer everything to her would be hard to imagine—and also, the happiness attained from using up all that power without care for any consequences—and the nerve-wrecking tension that came with the warmth in the heart—that was what she was feeling.

(—My—own—?)

At this moment, a shout could be heard. She did not know who was it; maybe both of them shouted at the same time,

**<SO YOU CAN'T DIE!!!!>**

After this voice echoed, Margery's consciousness snapped.

Yuji and Shana were standing on the roof of the Sakais' residence.

Both of them were standing on both ends of the beam, and the distance between them was not too close and not too far.

The person they should be protecting well was inside this house, ceasing to act.

Both of them used to train here countless times, during mornings and nights.

Their house, full of memories and warmth.

And now, both of them are clashing with each other.

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Finally, Shana, who had the 'Nietono no Shana' in her hands, spoke first.

"Yuji, what about Chigusa?"

"I've already moved on successfully."

Yuji, who was swing the 'Blutsauger' as he answered, revealed a somewhat lonely look.

Shana again checked his intentions.

"Right now, you're really acting on your own will instead of being a puppet, is it?"

"That's right. You can relax about that."

His answered clearly showed a cruel reality, that Sakai Yuji wasn't someone who's meant to be saved, but an enemy who had to be eliminated. The endless pain was sent back at the Flame Haze girl.

Of course, he knew what the girl was thinking, and because it's him, he understood it more than others. The reason why he answered that was because he wanted to declare his standpoint to the girl. She looked at her, and slowly spoke,

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“Shana, can you protect everyone you want to protect?”

“Eh!?”

This sudden casual question caused Shana to let out a doubtful voice.

Yuji continued to say as ‘Sakai Yuji’,

“What will happen if dad, who’s now moving all over the country is attacked by a ‘Denizen’? What if mom got attacked once she goes on a trip? Soon, there will be students leaving Misaki City, people that we know. Can you send Flame Hazes to follow them?”

“Well...”

“Impossible.” She could only answer that, but it would feel too cruel, so she did not answer that in the end. If that was a year ago, she could definitely answer it, but now, she couldn’t even do so.”

“This world is too big. It’s not something you can protect on your own...anyone could be attacked by the ‘Denizens’. It’s like they had no idea when their lives

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were given, nor when their lives would be taken away. However, this Misaki City alone, this place where I spent more than 10 years at already had some many people, and I had to protect them.”

Yuji’s tone sounded like he was angry at the world, but the smile of happiness still remained on his face. The two overlapping voices swore from deep within his heart .

“I’ll use these hands to change ‘the truth to this world’, and will remove all illogical possibilities from this world. This is to protect everyone who loved me, and everyone who I loved.”

The black flames swelled out from his breath, this unique black flames that only the God of Creation had, the one that would dye all colors black.

“Then, our comrades who were imprisoned by this cause and effect, the ‘Denizens’, I’ll allow them to exist too. I’ll create another set of rules and let them retain their identities. This is the original meaning behind my existence.”

The God of Creation casually said such ridiculous things. The God of Punishment warned in an inquiring manner.

“Are...are you going to do that again? Even if it's you, it's unlikely that you could do anything.”

“It's because of that that me, and my subordinates, prepared ourselves during the past thousands of years.”

After saying that, the God of Creation closed his eyes, and once he opened his eyes, he reverted back to the boy.

“Shana, even though you're just a fighting tool, you're amongst them.”

“...”

“Fight until you couldn't, and one day, your fatigue will reach its limit. You'll fall, you'll disappear...that's the fate of a Flame Haze...and I'll change your given destiny.”

The boy swore as 'Sakai Yuji',

"I'll, protect you."

"!"

Alastor was speechless as he looked at this boy in front of him. He heard of the boy's wishes and bombastic speeches that he would laugh off. But now, it became reality in the most terrifying way possible.

Yuji exerted the burning strength inside him into the 'Blutsauger', and swung it.

"Therefore, I wouldn't allow anyone to stop me. I hope that you would stand beside me and watch the new world reborn."

"...Yuji..."

Shana felt herself wobbling as she was shaken up strongly, but right now, that sense of responsibility in her mission and the pride in her heart barely managed to support her body as she raised the 'Nietono no Shana'. And then, as a killer, she started thinking all sorts of things like 'he'll dodge an overly simple spell', 'it's too

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close to materialize the flames now', 'any preparatory movements may show a fatal opening'.

Yuji knew that she would do that.

Thus, he endured the pain in his heart to fight her.

Otherwise, he would lose the right to stand alongside her.

"Shana, I always dreamt of a day to be with you."

The broadsword that was gripped tightly had blood-colored patterns all over it.

"As you wished—I became stronger, stronger, much stronger—therefore, now."

He bent down and concentrated his strength above, ready to launch an attack.

"To fight alongside you, to protect you, I'll begin my battle."

Shana's burning eyes swayed. While she could feel the happiness after hearing these words, she understood the sadness behind this. Right now, she could only choose to

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move forward, and she could only bear her own fate and continue to fight.

The few seconds felt like forever.

The moment Yuji bent down as he wanted to attack,

“!?”

What occupied his eyes wasn't a slash, and neither was it flames.

It was the nodachi 'Nietono no Shana'.

It was thrown out at a bullet-like speed.

He hurriedly blocked it and jumped into the air, but didn't see Shana there.

“!”

Yuji used his senses and almost all his concentration to observe and think,

Under this situation, what would Shana do?

To the ‘Snake of the Festival’ himself or any other powerful ‘Lords’, he should be able to predict what would happen during this time, but now—this advantage wouldn’t work for the boy who was the only exception.

(—Above!!)

The hands holding the Nietono no Shana tightly were raised up, and the crimson wings accelerated as they swung down.

After he blocked with the ‘Blutsauger’, Yuji used the dragontail behind his head to smack the rooftop and used the recoil to jump up.

Up to down, down to up, the slashes swung at each other.

Yuji swung the sword up.

Shana swung the sword down hard—

At the higher levels of the old Yoda department store, where the Haridan was located at, a girl and a boy were being extremely anxious.

Yoshida Kazumi and Tanaka Eita.

Margery's rampage went silent, and Wilhelmina could break through the ranks.

But the situation didn't improve.

In fact,

“Yo, Yoshida-san, hu, hurry up and run!”

“Tanaka-kun, you too—”

To them, the disaster was beginning.

The figure who was supposed to be fighting with Shana, the one who took the figure of that boy was now flying in a straight path at them. Right now, they didn't have to do anything. It's all over.

After seeing that figure close in, Yoshida couldn't help but grip onto the Greek cross 'Giralda' tightly, and thought,

(Can I use this?)

She wondered,

(Is it really worth it to use this now?)

This treasure tool was given to her by 'Colorful Whim' Pheles.

Once Yoshida used this, she could summon this extremely powerful 'Crimson Lord' over. Pheles' whereabouts and motives were all a mystery, but she should provide assistance when the 'Reiji Maigo' that contained her lover was sealed.

But now, there's two problems to this current situation.

First, this treasure tool need to be activated by the user's power of existence. In other words, once she used this, Yoshida would lose the power that allowed her to stay in this world, and will die.

Second, the Mystes that had the 'Reiji Maigo', whom she should save, wasn't on her side now, but the 'Denizens'. What would Pheles do if she was summoned.

Just when she was lost and wondering what she should do, she suddenly remembered something.

Right now, the one who was coming for her wasn't anyone else, but Sakai Yuuji.

At this moment, Yoshida was still dreaming.

*He should be able to settle everything right?*

*Things would end like this even if I don't summon Pheles here.*

(Sakai-kun's coming over...)

This girl went into a sweet dreamland just because of this fact.

And she expected to get the outcome she wanted.

Suddenly,

The concrete wall crumbled as if it exploded.

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“UWAH!!?”

Tanaka was blown aside, and he collapsed on the hill of blocks.

“Ah!?”

Yoshida fell onto the ground as well.

“Ah?...are you two alright?”

A familiar boy's voice could be heard besides them, just like how it sounded whenever they met on the streets or in school.

More than him, both of them were more shocked by that voice, and were thoroughly stunned.

Then, they finally realized the anomaly on the person.

“Sa, Sa, Sakai!?”

“...!” He didn't look any different, but there was a dragon tail behind his head. He was wear scarlet red armor and clothes, and what's even more terrifying was that he was holding the bloodied and unconscious Flame Haze girl.

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“When Satou said that he would be going out, I thought that there wouldn’t be anyone here.”

His tone was like usual, but now it gave an uncomfortable feeling. It’s unknown how aware he was as he didn’t look at the two of them unnaturally. He didn’t look especially worried that the girl in his hands was covered in blood.

They did not witness that battle just now, and even if they heard of the tragedy that went on through the tag, they heard Yuji’s voice, and seeing how he’s treating them now, the realism was somewhat diluted.

“Where...did you go back then?”

Tanaka asked this no-brainer for the girl standing beside him, trembling, to the person who looked like his friend. And without waiting for him to answer, he looked at the girl in his arms, and asked again,

“Sa, Sakai, you, you saved, Shana-chan, right?”

The familiar face, and the familiar attitude; these appeared in an abnormal situation. Just this, this alone, was enough to feel some redemption in his heart.

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It's unknown whether Yuji realized his friend's feelings, as he said it without a care,

"I'm going somewhere far for now. You don't have to worry about Shana, I'm bringing her there."

"But you're not bringing her back to the Sakai's residence" both of them knew this clearly. They also felt that an unknown world was expanding behind the boy, and an endless darkness was widening its bloody mouth .

A voice came from the darkness.

"I came here to get this."

Yuji moved the hand that was carrying Shana, and pointed a finger out before saying.

The place he pointed to was the model Margery used to stand on.

"This?"

Just when Tanaka showed his surprise, the model started to rattle, looking like it was breaking apart the toy bonds, and all the blocks floated up. Each part floated

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around Tanaka and Yoshida under zero gravity, and started to collapse.

“U, UWA!!”

“AHH!!?”

Amidst the chaos, there was a sudden flash of light, and an object jumped, landed on Yuji’s hand, floated for a while in the air, before landing on Shana, who had her eyes closed.

That was a round bronze mirror that looked like it was as big as two hands.

Having collapsed onto the floor together with the rest of the blocks, Tanaka knew that this was the true identity of the treasure tool ‘Haridan’. Feeling reluctant about losing it after so long, and sensing that there would be danger after losing this treasure tool that was incredibly useful to Flame Hazes, he shouted out instinctively,

“SAKAI! THAT’S—!”

“What’s wrong with that? It used to be mine after all.”

Yuji replied coldly, and turned around to walk off as if he was done.

Seeing the back of the boy who walked out without hesitation, Yoshida cried with a small voice that was forced out with all her strength,

“Ah...wait!”

Yuji didn't turn around as he stopped in mid-air.

“Sakai...kun.”



She could tell the outcome from the attitude, but Yoshida still couldn't help but ask. But how would the other person's immediate reply hurt her? This made her a little fearful about the truth,

"Ah, that..."

Actually, there should be a lot of things to talk about. Shana's letter used to be her hope, she continued to believe, even till now, and was finally able to meet him. If she wanted to say it, she could have filled her entire heart up.

But most importantly—

"...Take...her back? You're taking Shana-chan?"

In the end, she could only say this.

Are you alright? What's going on? What happened? Why did you do this? More than anything else, more than any other question she felt was extremely important, asking this question could be said to be top priority.

Yuji opened his mouth.

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“Un.”

He didn't look back as he just answered simply.

“!!”

To Yoshida, this was already enough.

The girl collapsed on the floor as she lost all her strength, unable to even kneel at all. She continued to squeeze her last ounce of hope and said,

“...That letter, why did you...?”

If he intended to choose Shana, why did he send the letter back to her?

Intending to keep this hope until the end, she asked this question for an answer she could work with.

But right now, the figure that was standing in front of him was ever so stiff, distant, icy cold, and unapproachable.

Yuji's gaze went past his shoulder slightly as he looked at her.

“Because I promised.”

The ever-kind voice came out as if he never changed at all.

“Eh?”

“I said before that I wouldn’t leave like this without saying anything. No matter the outcome, I would say it to you.”

“...!”

“I really couldn’t say anything to hurt you, but I couldn’t just disappear without saying anything, so I told you all I could tell you. That was my thoughts when I wrote those letters.”

What he showed was honesty, and it couldn’t be doubted.

But to Yoshida, this honesty brought an endless abyss of despair.

This time, Yoshida lowered her head and kneeled on the floor.

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Beside her were the toy blocks that were wrecked and unable to be put back.

She chose the road that she thought was alright, only to end up like this.

“Sakai-kun...Sakai...kun...”

Kneeling on the floor, she continued to call his name like a plea, but he didn’t give her the answer she wanted.

What he responded with was a courteous voice that she expected.

“If you can go back, please, hurry up and do so. Nothing changed now...but it’s better to go back than to stay in such a place.

Sadness, anger, regret, joy, happiness, oppressive. A voice that had all sorts of feelings.

But it did not have the feeling Yoshida wanted.

Even when he disappeared, Yoshida didn’t manage to find her hope.



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## Epilogue

Right now, the Outlaw headquarters of Europe, which ruled over the entire world was shifted to Zurich in Switzerland.

Or rather, it was back to where it was from.

The 'Performer of Depressing Ambush' Dorel Kubelik, who was once the leader, once proposed to spread the functions of the base here here all over the world, but while this plan was being executed, he was attacked and died...and then, the base functions were gathered back here again.

Kubelik and his 'Kubelik's Orchestra' were completely annihilated, causing the central structure of Outlaw to descend into chaos, which could then be said to be the silver lining in the cloud, since there was still a majority of the scattered functions of the base...mainly the hardware. There were many handing-over of authority and lots of new procedures. After a fight over authority, the obstinate humans finally succumbed, and the organization started to rebuild itself.

(Though it was just the beginning.)

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There would definitely be opposition. The organization always had disputes, and also, the higher-ranked humans and Flame Hazes seemed to be unable to reach a common agreement, causing difficulties in communications. The chaos in the organization caused errors and breakdowns in messages and contact, each side's area of control started shrinking, and it became harder to grasp the situation.

(Even so, it was a lot better than before.)

In fact, all parties were extremely enthusiastic. If they only cared about fighting each other, the world would soon give up on itself. There was no time for this, and they started to understand this slowly.

And the catalyst to this was the collapse of the Shanghai headquarters.

The 'Kuilunhui' that managed East Asia for generations took a misstep, causing the entire army to collapse. In the end, an abnormal and pain situation happened. Of the entire setup of East Asia, only the independent Japan and reserve forces were left as the other places were left empty.

(Also, their opponent was 'Bal Masque'. Most likely...)

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Ever since they lost their leader ‘Snake of the Festival’ in ancient times, they would hardly causing conflict on their own, but now, they started swarming in unexpectedly...no. Now that the world’s greatest organization was about to ‘begin war’, it wasn’t just as simple as ringing an alarm to the people fighting over something simple. The range and depth of this blow was even stronger.

(I don’t know if I can make it in time.)

Inside a room at the Zurich headquarters, the leader’s room had a long leather chair that was so big it was hard to get used to it (Dorel was rather extravagant on this kind of thing). The ‘Braider of Trembling Might’ Sophie Sawallisch was sitting on it and sighing.

The people running the organization were mainly humans, so the organization’s restructuring should be rather smooth-sailing, but no matter what, this would have to take some time.

Outlaw, which normally takes in stragglers who had nowhere to go, started to operate in a manner as big and complex as an organization, and the old situation of gathering a large army at one go is no completely gone.

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And most importantly,

(Yu Xuan and Di Hong...were all good children.)

During the failure of Shanghai, there were too many losses on the actual combatants' side. The Chinese Flame Hazes who had this precious characteristic were basically defeated. Their power could have been used in this reconstruction.

(So the enemy could take them out before the next war ...)

In this tough situation, she could seemingly hear that 3-eyed witch, that sly 'Lord' laughing in a shrill manner.)

(If Doni and Alex were still alive, they could give me some good suggestions now.)

"If the supreme commander continues to sigh like this, all the soldiers of the army will be affect, you know, Sophie Sawallisch-kun?"

Perhaps realizing that Sophie liked to reminisce about the past whenever she took this seat, the blue star that was sewn into the bell, the divine tool 'Dona' let out the

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voice of the 'Lord' who gave her this supernatural power , the 'Thunder Blade of Punishment' Takemikazuchi..

"Un, well, I know that...no, I guess I should know. Takemikazuchi-shi."

After saying that, she couldn't help but laugh.

"Ufufu, if there's some time, I would start to think of some unnecessary things...I spent less than a thousand years, so my mentality would age a lot. Is that it?"

"If you can call yourself old, it's going to be rude to our next guests."

On hearing him say that in such a cheery tone, Sophie was somewhat touched. Anyone would feel tired about handling such difficult and busy stuff.

At this moment,

CHING LING—

The bell sounded.

The guests they seemed to be waiting for have finally arrived.

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“Please enter.”

Sophie said as she stood up.

The heavy and posh paulownia doors opened, and the guests came in with heavy steps. He looked like a kid, but he was carrying a large thing—something that was about twice as tall as he was. IT was wrapped tightly in cloth, but one look was enough to tell that it wasn't just heavy.

The visitor took off the straw hat he was wearing and showed his face.

That was a boy's face.

He had scars all over his face, and most notably, a scar on the lip that would look like it hurt.

“Ahh, long time no see, Sophie Sawallisch.”

An old man's coarse voice could be heard from the strand of beads that's wrapped around the boy's left hand.

“Un, it's been like 10...no 20 years since we last met, right?”

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The greetings each other had sounded abnormally stern.

Sophie looked at this boy who was one of the oldest Flame Hazes, and said in a steady voice,

“It’s nice to meet you again—‘Mobilizer of Ceremonial Equipment’ Khamshin and ‘Steadfast Sharp Peak’ Behemoth.”

As they take action, they move everywhere.

Involving everything, wrecking everything.

As the world simply existed, a storm was brewing.